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Version: Full Version

Citation: Tross, David (2021) How people across the UK experience and perceive happiness in their lives and their society. [Thesis] (Unpublished)

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**How People Across the UK Experience and Perceive Happiness in their Lives
and Society**

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Happiness Studies have become an increasingly significant part of public policy at a national and international level (UNSDN 2019; Layard 2011) with the United Nation's global happiness day website (2014) affirming 'the relevance of happiness and well-being as universal goals and aspirations in the lives of human beings around the world and the importance of their recognition in public policy objectives'. Since 2012, the United Nations Sustainable Development Network (UNSDN) has published an annual 'World Happiness Report', collating three major cross-national surveys, the Gallup World Poll, the World Values Survey and the European Social Survey and ranking 156 countries according to their happiness self-reports (UNSDN 2018). In the UK, the then Prime Minister David Cameron's commissioning of an ONS-led UK happiness index to measure national wellbeing (ONS 2011) follows on from other government-backed initiatives in France, Canada, Bhutan (Pavot & Diener 2013; UNSDN 2018). In 2019, the New Zealand Government announced its first "Wellbeing Budget" to focus public spending on wellbeing priorities including Mental Health services and reducing levels of child poverty and family violence (New Zealand Treasury 2019).

Although scholars since antiquity have explored human happiness (McMahon 2006), the surge in happiness studies in recent decades has two key drivers. The first concerns the quality of life in affluent, Western societies, with evidence suggesting that while these societies have become richer, people are no happier (Layard 2011). The second is a shift in the claims made about the efficacy of methods to both measure and increase happiness, with numerous scholars hailing contemporary happiness studies as a 'new science' (Layard 2011; Diener 2008; Seligman 2011; Kahneman & Krueger 2006).

Other scholars, while broadly supporting efforts to find alternative measures of societal progress, cite key concerns with contemporary happiness research (see inter alia Thin 2012; Mathews 2012; Cieslik 2014; Tiberius 2013). One centres on what Thin (2012:312) has termed the 'numerical reification of happiness', an assumption that an understanding of a person's evaluation of their own happiness and wellbeing can be understood solely through a one-shot, numerical self-report. Lacking qualitative data to explore the ways in which people interpret survey questions and the reasoning behind the numbers they choose, quantitative researchers apply regression analysis across a range of individual and objective characteristics to isolate the independent variables of a high or low happiness score. In so doing, happiness researchers make heroic claims about, say, which populations are happier than others through techniques that only 'skim the surface of subjective perspective' (Bernard 2000:31), delimiting scholarly understanding of both people's subjective

experience of happiness and wellbeing and the range of these experiences across and within societies and social groups.

By isolating and classifying happiness as a scientific construct, a “thing” detached from the ‘living and breathing, embodied and feeling’ (Plummer 2001:5) human subject from whom this “thing” comes to be, a potentially alienating account of human happiness is produced. This has meant a kind of paradox lies at the heart of the happiness studies, where the project to promote the significance of human happiness relies on a methodology which produces rather thin, pallid accounts. These studies provide few insights about what really matters to people and are at risk of becoming separated from everyday understandings of happiness and the normative, evaluative processes that contribute to these (Cieslik 2017). At the very least, as Thin (2012:316) has argued, we need ‘to explore the stories behind the numbers’ to find out what people’s self-ratings actually mean.

At a societal level, aggregating numerical self-reports and presenting the average of the total sum as ‘national wellbeing’ neglects more complex perspectives about the concept of increasing or enhancing general happiness and wellbeing. Recent research (ONS 2011; Dolan 2011; Action for happiness 2014) provides glimpses of lay perspectives on national wellbeing aligned with ideas about the ‘greater good’, viewing an increase in general wellbeing being contingent on adopting policies to produce greater equality and to safeguard essential services. Crucially, these studies suggest that people are able to make a distinction between what is good for their individual wellbeing and what is good for society as a whole. In addition to critiques of viewing national happiness as the aggregate of individual self-reports (Thin 2012; Eichhorn 2014), a lack of qualitative data about perceptions of and prescriptions for national wellbeing neglects the depth of people’s concerns, reducing them to self-interested choosers acting within an entirely individualistic framework.

These concerns about the way both individual and social happiness are measured are not purely epistemological. They are also about the way happiness is conceptualised. As Bryman (2012:6) notes, ‘methods are not simply neutral tools; they are linked with the way in which social scientists envision...the nature of social reality’. In positivist studies, happiness is conceptualised as a descriptive category of an internal-state psychological phenomenon of a larger or smaller size of satisfactions and positive emotions existing at a particular point in time. This neglects an important second aspect of happiness: a normative one about the nature of a good life, one that people deem fit to be wanted (Walker & Kavedžija 2015; Tiberius 2013) as well as a concept critically reflected on in relation to the pursuit of happiness in life. These are not abstract questions but ones grounded in everyday practices ‘involving struggle and negotiation where people make ongoing choices about

how best to live their lives' (Cieslik 2014:5). The few qualitative studies that access subjective interpretations about the nature of happiness show these to be often aligned with classical and contemporary ideas about happiness as eudemonia or flourishing. That is, they capture an important normative aspect about values, meaningful goals and social engagement that are often directly linked to people's satisfactions but sometimes override these. Conceptualising and then operationalising happiness as a quantity of positive emotions and levels of satisfactions which people seek to maximise, as the majority of quantitative studies do, may fail to capture these more complex, processual dimensions.

This research addresses three key concerns about the way happiness is being conceptualised and measured in social scientific research. Firstly, concerns about the research methodology adopted by large-scale social surveys, the numerical reification of happiness and the consequent lack of interpretive data about the stories, meanings, reasons and causal factors behind numerical self-reports. Second, concerns about the theoretical assumptions around utility and hedonic happiness underpinning these surveys, positioning individuals as happiness maximisers and neglecting more complex, social and processual dimensions. Third, a reductionist conception of national or general wellbeing as the aggregate of individual self-reports without any interpretive data exploring how individuals perceive their society in its happiness and wellbeing (Mathews 2012:309). These concerns led to the formation of four main research questions, explored in depth in Ch3.

1. How do happiness accounts align with contemporary and classical depictions of happiness as eudemonia or flourishing?
2. Using happiness as a 'conceptual lens' (Thin 2012), what does a focus on the experience and perceptions of degrees of happiness tell us about what matters most to people across life as a whole?
3. How do social factors (e.g. age, class) mediate individual experiences and perceptions of happiness and wellbeing?
4. How do people perceive happiness in their society?

Adopting a qualitative, interpretive methodology, this research aims to help 'bring happiness scholarship to a greater maturity' (Thin 2012:314) by providing a richer, thicker understanding of people's subjective experience of happiness and wellbeing than one understood in essentialist terms. This research project is part of a growing movement of academics in the social sciences who consider the study of happiness and wellbeing to be an important aspect of understanding

contemporary society but are dissatisfied with the direction of travel of much happiness research (Cieslik 2017; Bartram 2012; Hyman 2014; Thin 2014).

The thesis makes the following key contributions to current debates in Happiness Studies. Firstly, it illustrates how meanings and constructions of happiness are varied and complex. In particular, it problematises an ontological understanding dominant in happiness studies that individuals experience and perceive happiness as part of a strategy to increase their hedonic satisfaction, and that they are responsible for creating their own happiness. Instead, a more collaborative, contingent and circumspect attitude towards “achieving” happiness emerges as a key theme. Second, the thesis challenges sociological treatments that situate the issue of happiness as part of a broader, pessimistic account of “Individualization” where agents retreat into consumerist and therapeutic strategies to construct their personal version of a happy life. Instead, individual accounts often explicitly push back against this notion, offering both alternative normative constructions of how they can flourish, detailing experiences and senses of happiness grounded in meaningful, creative and socially connected activities.

The way age mediates happiness provides a subtle understanding of the way happiness is experienced and perceived differently at different stages of the life-course. Age may, as much happiness research tells us, determine how happy people are, but this thesis also illustrates how meanings and understandings of happiness change as we age. This implies that happiness is less an objective, measurable entity than something more processual and contingent. Lastly, the thesis shows how broader societal themes (e.g. political disenchantment), and how these are evaluated as factors of concern, condition individual experience and perceptions of happiness, particularly when identifying factors of unhappiness. Not only does this further challenge assumptions that happiness in western countries is something individualistic in scope, but also questions whether accounts of ‘national happiness’ such as appears in the ONS-led initiative in the UK can be limited to the aggregate of personal satisfactions. If someone is happy with their own life but deeply concerned about happiness in their society, then attempts to capture ‘national happiness’ that neglect this social dimension may be providing a rather limited picture.

In terms of the thesis structure, following this Introduction chapter, **Chapter Two** reviews the literature, focusing on three elements of Happiness Studies: the recent decades of happiness research, a more historical and philosophical overview of happiness theorizing and exploring sociological contributions to the field. **Chapter Three** outlines the research project and the methodology used, followed by six empirical data chapters based on the key themes emerging from the data analysis.

Chapter Four focuses on the meaning of happiness. This is shown to be a complex matter, not least in the way many respondents critique popular ideas of happiness as feeling good or striving for greater happiness. Through themes about the illusory and fleeting nature of pleasure and how happiness needs to be situated within a more holistic appreciation of life with its ups and downs, the responses show a more critical and nuanced perception of happiness than is often portrayed in Happiness Studies. Connected to my first research question, the way in which respondents situate and position themselves in relation to key philosophical frameworks of happiness concerning Eudemonia, Utilitarianism, Epicureanism and Stoicism are also explored.

Chapters Five and Six examine what kinds of happiness are most important to respondents and how, connected to my second research question, these connect to key themes of meaning and motivation in life. **Chapter Five** shows how relational life is crucial to flourishing and therefore may necessitate a more socially situated and less individualistic concept of happiness than is often deployed in happiness research. It tries to shed light on some key findings of mainstream happiness research about why relationships are so important, in particular the way safety and esteem needs are met. It also shows, in relation to significant moments across the life-course, how the idea of happiness understood as a greater degree of positive emotions is problematic; instead, events like weddings and births are significant because of their contribution to the overall journey, not for how they may have been experienced at the time.

Chapter Six explores a significant advantage of interpretive data: what is more or less significant, or meaningful for wellbeing according to people themselves. Within the huge variety of engagements this involved, key eudemonic themes of achievement, , mastery, learning and growth underscored why some activities and pursuits mattered more than others. In addition, even in ordinary moments like listening to music or walking in the countryside, some respondents talked about these in terms of transcendence and the elevating qualities of certain experiences. Themes of personal fulfilment and communal bonding also underscored a broad range of activities narrated as positive sources of happiness. The relationship between these themes and social class is also explored.

Chapters Seven and Eight explore unhappiness. **Chapter Seven** demonstrates how the very things that help individuals flourish can also cause suffering. But there are specific aspects of unhappiness that cannot be explained as the “flipside” of positive flourishing. In relation to my third research question, the way in which suffering is located within marginalised groups, particularly disabled individuals reliant on state support, shows how happiness is not simply an internal or relational matter but a social and political question of service provision and meeting needs. In addition, the

way we are treated by others and how we are treating them links unhappiness to wider questions about moral conduct and the happy life.

A particularly striking theme emerging from these responses and the focus of **Chapter Eight** is how people are unhappy with wider social and political institutions and conditions. This was unexpected, as around half incorporated these evaluations as part of their unhappiness without being asked. This was expressed through themes of disillusionment with politics and institutions (from across the ideological spectrum), moral breakdown and a more global concern for humanity and its prospects. As well as being directly relevant for my fourth research question about how individuals perceive happiness in their society as a whole, this also linked to my first two research questions: does happiness, instead of being something personal, have a wider social entity? And if respondents were so concerned about wider social conditions and included this within the scope of *their* happiness, what does this mean for the ways happiness is conceptualised and measured, not least how the idea of national wellbeing is operationalised?

Chapter Nine explores how age mediated these responses and links directly to my third research question of how objective characteristics shape happiness accounts. In particular, ageing changes not just how happiness is experienced but also what it means. Some of the assumptions about the relationships between different ages and happiness in research studies are also challenged. Lastly, **Chapter Ten**, the conclusion, summarises and synthesises these themes and discusses some implications for Happiness Studies, particularly for Social Scientific research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Surveying the literature, the concept of happiness appears at once something obvious yet unknowable, meaningful but also elusive (Vitterso 2016). Most scholars are agreed that it seems to involve an emotion yet is more than just affect. It seems to involve some subjective judgement about quality of life but can also override satisfaction and contentment. It has been called by many the ultimate aim of most individuals albeit one that can only be pursued indirectly (McMahon 2013). For Hyman (2014:2), 'happiness is an important aspect of personhood', and for Vitterso (2016:1) something 'that matters more to us than anything else' though it has also been described as an illusion, and even, in a recent polemic, an industry (Davies 2015). The slipperiness of happiness perhaps relates to it being both a description of a pleasurable experience and a normative concept about the good life. Happiness, therefore, sits uneasily between the everyday and the theoretical.

Ideas about happiness go back as far as the first acknowledged texts of history and philosophy (McMahon 2013) in the Western canon, yet the concept has assumed a new significance in the 21st century, being both an increasing focus of public policy and a proclaimed 'new science' (Layard 2011). The rise of Happiness Studies in the last 40 years has resulted in an array of national and global happiness surveys that have caught the attention of policy makers and been operationalised by Governments and supranational institutions including Canada, France, the UK, New Zealand, the OECD and the United Nations. The 'World Happiness Report', first commissioned by the UN in 2012, begins its 2015 survey by stating that since that first publication 'the world has changed'. This may be somewhat exaggerating the case, but it is a good indication of the prominence of happiness within the public policy arena.

Happiness Studies draw on a rich historical tradition of theorising from some of the most celebrated figures in philosophical, political and economic disciplines, whose ideas about utility, flourishing, resilience and suffering still largely frame the key debates among contemporary scholars, particularly in the competing traditions of 'hedonic' and 'eudemonic' happiness (Vitterso 2016). Sociology's contribution to happiness scholarship has been largely dismissive, tending to view the concept as part of a wider 'problem with modernity' (Thin 2014), though belatedly, there has been a move to embed happiness research within the discipline (Cieslik 2014).

This chapter reviews the contested definition of happiness, the historical development of the concept and the key and often conflicting conceptual traditions, particularly hedonic and eudemonic schools of thought. It presents a critical overview of the recent proliferation of inter-disciplinary empirical studies grouped under happiness and wellbeing research and lastly, explore elements of a sociological contribution to happiness studies that leads into the research proposal.

Happiness Studies

The past 40 years have seen concerted efforts to measure happiness at a national and international level 'as a way of promoting the quality of life of people around the globe' (Cieslik 2014:2). Although philosophers and political theorists since antiquity have explored human happiness, the recent surge in research and prominence of the subject has two key drivers. The first reflects concerns around the quality of life in developed, western societies, in response to evidence that 'for most types of people in the west, happiness has not increased...despite massive increases in income at every point of the income distribution' (Layard 2011:3), the second to a shift in the claims made about epistemologies to measure and increase happiness, prompting some scholars to hail these developments as a 'new science' (Layard 2011; Diener 2008; Seligman 2002; Kahneman et al 1999). Led primarily by economists (key figures include Richard Layard, Joseph Stiglitz and Paul Dolan), a large body of empirical data has been generated through national and international surveys to 'augment economic indicators of development with other positive subjective measures' (Cieslik 2014:2). Another key disciplinary input has been the efforts of psychologists (key figures include Ed Diener, Martin Seligman, Jonathan Haidt and Sonya Lybormosky) whose emphasis has been on producing positive models of human experience 'that transcend traditional deficit models that focus on reducing suffering' (Cieslik 2014:2).

Much of the impetus for empirical happiness research can be traced back to a 1974 paper by the US economist Robert Easterlin (1974) which appeared to show that rising wealth in the United States had made no corresponding positive impact on levels of subjective life satisfaction, while day to day happiness, or 'positive affect', had even declined. Confounding traditional economic theory that rising wealth would lead to greater happiness, the so-called 'Easterlin paradox' suggesting 'we are richer but no happier' (Layard 2011:3) remains at the heart of happiness studies literature found in journals like *Happiness Studies* and *Social Indicators Research* and in landmark papers, books and online databases written and compiled by prominent happiness researchers like Diener (2008), Layard (2011), Kahneman (1999) and Veenhoven (1984 onwards).

A key explanation of the 'Easterlin paradox' is that for developed, Western societies rising income has little influence on happiness once basic needs have been satisfied. Two psychological processes delimit the amount of happiness gained by further increases in material wealth. First, "adaptive preference", where 'people's judgements about their present state are based on whether it is better or worse than the state to which they have become accustomed' (Haidt 2006:85-86). When income rises, so do expectations, so that the 'riches you accumulate will...leave you no better off than you were before' (Haidt 2006:86). A short-term boost in happiness is experienced before adjustment to

this new level and, once adaptation is complete, 'only continual new stimuli can raise your wellbeing' (Layard 2011:42). Hence the alternative term, the 'hedonic treadmill', signifying the self-defeating pursuit of happiness through material gain.

The second is 'social comparison', illustrating the relative worth of earnings, so that satisfaction with income depends on what other people are getting. Therefore, whether you are happy with your levels of material wealth 'depends on how it compares with some norm. And that norm depends on two things: what other people get and what you yourself are used to getting. In the first case your feelings are governed by social comparison, in the second by habituation' (Layard 2011:42). In addition, researchers surveying social data over the last 50 years have shown that the Easterlin paradox can be applied to a broader range of social indicators. In the UK real-term gains in income and healthy life expectancy across all social classes has not been matched by progress across a range of happiness and wellbeing indicators relating to community life, relationships, trust and social solidarity (Layard 2011; Wilkinson & Pickett 2010; ONS 2019).

Because 'personal and subjective measures of wellbeing imply the existence of wider social structures that enable or constrain actors and can be the source of individual wellbeing' (Cieslik 2014:2), much attention has been focused on identifying and isolating these causal factors. It has also led to more multi-dimensional measures that conceptualise individual wellbeing as 'all the things people need in order to lead a good life' (Dean 2009:4) involving material and psychological 'quality of life' indicators that range from how people feel about their lives to objective needs satisficers e.g. education, income and quality of housing.

Influential Human Needs theories include Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), the UN Human Development index (2013) and Amartya Sen's work on capabilities (Sen 1999, Nussbaum 2011). What these ideas generally have in common are a recognition of both the material and psychological foundations of a fulfilling life (Ryff 1989; Ryan & Deci 2000) and the limitations of 'adopting either positive affect or life satisfaction as the sole metric for considering the quality of life' (Alkire 2015:4). Wellbeing and quality of life indexes (including the UK's Government commissioned National Wellbeing Measure and the OECD's 'Better Life Index') operationalise multiple domains to provide a fuller analysis and measurement of how a person is doing, of which happiness is arguably one component, alongside health, employment and other domains (OECD 2012; ONS 2018; Sen 1999).

But as these are normative questions about what a good life consists of and what governments should do to help facilitate this, increasingly happiness and wellbeing have been conceptualised as separate entities, happiness as something subjective and descriptive and wellbeing as something objectively defined (Vitterso 2016). As I aim to demonstrate, this splitting of the normative feature

of happiness from subjective description reduces the concept to something rather thin and individualistic¹. So while Diener (1999:278) states that ‘few people would argue that subjective wellbeing is the only ingredient of a good life’, the removal of the objective, normative aspect from the concept has led some influential scholars to assume precisely that and posit that the sole measure of good is experienced or revealed happiness (Layard 2011).

An emphasis on the significance of social conditions for individual happiness, and the way in which particular social conditions can be seen to inhibit this, echoes key sociological concepts that highlight the plight and ‘anomie’ of individuals in developed western societies (Durkheim 1990). Happiness is framed as a ‘problem with modernity’ where individuals are ‘incited to live as if making a project for themselves’ (Rose 1996:157). Individual freedom ‘poses a burden on the individual (*leading to*) feelings of isolation, powerlessness and insecurity’ (Rose 1996:54) as status identity is something to be achieved through personal effort alone.

This sociological lens emphasises suffering, particularly how social injustice and inequalities inhibits species-being (Dean 2016). A key strand of research connected to this examines the relationship between individual happiness and social inequality, a major catalyst being the emergence of the more socially equal and tax redistributing countries of Scandinavia as “the happiest countries” in global surveys (including World Values Survey, the Gallup World Poll and the European Social Survey; for a comprehensive annual assessment see UNSDN 2018). In the UK, people living in households with low levels of disposable income are less satisfied with their lives (ONS 2019) while those living in more deprived areas also report lower levels of life satisfaction (Dorling 2013; Deeming 2013). Research undertaken by Wilkinson & Pickett (2010) has unearthed striking correlations between social equality and wellbeing by comparing a range of indicators, including levels of trust and mental illness, across richer nations. Their data shows how socially unequal nations do worse than more equal ones across a range of outcomes. Post-2008 recession research across European countries also suggests that growing inequality within countries is negatively correlated with self-reported happiness (Carbonelli & Ramos 2012).

The UN-commissioned World Happiness Report (UNSDN 2018), which collates and analyses data from 156 countries sourced from the Gallup World Poll, the World Values Survey and the European

¹ As such, I will use the terms happiness and wellbeing inter-changeably. Wellbeing is often depicted in contemporary studies as a much broader concept than happiness, one about how people are doing across a wide range of indicators. However, as Vitterso (2016) shows, there is no single, agreed definition for either of these terms. In addition, the separation of these objective, normative dimensions from the concept of happiness is a feature of happiness scholarship in the utilitarian, hedonic tradition (McMahon 2006). Academics writing from more eudemonic happiness perspectives (e.g. Cieslik 2014) will often not make the distinction.

Social Survey, suggests six determinants of happier nations: GDP per capita, healthy years of life expectancy, social support, absence of corruption, autonomy and generosity (measured by charitable donations). Creating a league table of the happiness of nations, the report makes clear that while happier countries are predominantly richer nations², the gap is not as large as might be expected given inequalities in income and standard of living (UNSDN 2018; Diener 1999). This is often explained by adaptive preference: 'extra income is really valuable when it lifts people away from sheer physical poverty...the extra happiness provided by extra income is greatest when you are poor, and declines steadily as you get richer' (Layard 2011:33). The strongest correlation is between unhappiness and lower income (Lelkes 2013; Pavot & Diener 2013) which may indicate where government efforts to increase wellbeing would be most effective.

However, the Easterlin paradox and sociological critiques of modernity may obscure a more content reality. Around 70% of Western Europe, North American and Antipodean populations consistently describe themselves as satisfied with their lives (UNSDN 2018). In the UK, ONS (2018) data paints a fairly positive picture of the UK's wellbeing, with three quarters of respondents satisfied with their lives (a figure that has slightly increased since 2012) alongside high rates of satisfaction with relationships, accommodation and community life. However, other UK data in the survey paints a less positive picture. There are rising rates of mental illness, a quarter of respondents report high levels of anxiety and since 2012, people's satisfaction with their incomes, jobs, health and leisure time have all fallen (ONS 2018).

These headline-grabbing data sets, at least some of which are likely to be familiar to any lay person encountering mainstream media sources, make what Thin (2012) calls 'heroic' truth claims about national happiness. This is testament to the faith happiness researchers have placed in numerical self-reports which are then aggregated to create a national happiness rating.

Operationalising Subjective Wellbeing (SWB)

In the vast majority of the studies cited above, happiness is operationalised as a construct termed 'Subjective Well Being-SWB', 'optimal psychological experience and functioning based on how people evaluate for themselves the level of their experienced wellness' (Jugureanu & Hughes 2010:1). Subjective wellbeing is measured as a composite of the affective and cognitive subjective happiness traditions, combining measures of life satisfaction with those of positive and negative affect. These developments constitute a rejection of top-down theories of happiness (based on theories of needs) to a bottom-up approach underpinned by democratic principles: as happiness 'is

² 19 of the 20 happiest countries are members of the OECD (Costa Rica is the exception)

about how people evaluate their lives and what is important to them' (Diener 2008:5) a person is themselves 'the authority on whether or not he is happy' (Telfer 1980:9).

Subjective Wellbeing has been developed, proponents (Cummins 2013; Diener 1999) claim, through common understandings and usages of happiness as 'the name we put on thinking and feeling positively about one's life' (Diener 2008:4). Debunking the idea that happiness is a mysterious and unknowable entity, 'surveys have asked people what they mean by it, and they say either that it is often being in a state of joy or other positive emotion, or it is being satisfied with one's life' (Argyle 2001:1).

The affective or emotional component of happiness, 'which refers to a transient, positive state of mind that has been caused by a specific experience' (Cummins 2013:185) and the evaluative component of happiness, which refers to an appraisal of overall life satisfaction (Pavot & Diener 2013) are operationalised by asking people to quantify the frequency of positive emotions and their overall evaluation of satisfactions on two discrete 11-point 0-10 Likert scales. Because people often also define happiness negatively as 'the absence of depression, anxiety and other negative emotions' (Argyle 2001:2) a third 0-10 Likert scale, negative affect, generally measuring current levels of anxiety, is added.

In this 'bottom-up situational theory' (Diener 1999) or 'bottom-up spillover theory' (Sirgy & Cornwall 2001), life satisfaction, the cognitive aspect of SWB, is thought to be 'on top of a satisfaction hierarchy...functionally related to satisfaction with all of life's domains' (Sirgy & Cornwall 2001:127), such as relationships, work and health. Since these surveys don't ask individuals to interpret their numerical response (for an exception see Dolan 2011), researchers then attempt to isolate causal factors by applying regression analysis either to a range of satisfaction ratings in separate domains or to a range of objective data (including employment, marital status, age and ethnicity).

Through this statistical regularity pattern of causation applied to data across nations, a consensus is that relationships, health, income and employment are all key determinants of higher self-reported happiness. (Pavot & Diener 2013; Layard 2017; Layard et al 2013). In the UK, the Wellbeing Index (ONS 2018) identifies the main predictors of high SWB as being in employment, enjoying good health and having positive relationships, while unemployment and divorce are two key predictors of low subjective wellbeing. Another strong relationship, particularly in developed nations, is between age and happiness, the so-called "u-index": happiness levels are high in early adulthood, deteriorate in middle age before reaching their apex in the 65-74 years old age group (Branchflower & Oswald 2008; Frijters & Beaton 2012).

Other research has examined the relationship between happiness and personality traits, highlighting a positive correlation between extraversion and happiness (Diener 1999; Oishi et al 2013). Extending this notion of the extent to which happiness is determined by innate personal characteristics, researchers have also explored the genetic component of subjective happiness, indicating there may be a genetically-determined happiness set-point or range which remains relatively stable throughout the life-course (Haidt 2006). Diener (1999:294), surveying 30 years of happiness research, suggests that an archetypal “happy person” is ‘blessed with a positive temperament, tends to look on the bright side of things, does not ruminate excessively about bad events, is living in an economically developed society, has social confidants, and possesses adequate resources for making progress towards valued goals’.

Critiquing Happiness Measurement

Drawing on the ‘hedonic’ tradition, the presentation of happiness as a countable entity has caught the imagination of national governments and supranational institutions, with policy makers asserting the desirability of introducing happiness measures into policy design. The measure is controversial, however, with one critic calling it ‘an extraordinary exercise in reducing complex self-evaluation and life evaluation to numerical form’ (Thin 2012:314).

One debate surrounds cultural variation (Walker & Kavedžija 2015; Mathews 2012). Notwithstanding that the ‘happy person’ Diener depicts can only feasibly be living in Western countries, critics have suggested that a cultural bias underpins much of the research, so that the concept of happiness residing internally in autonomous individual pursuing personal goals is a Western, liberal discursive production about a happy life (Hyman 2014; Jugureanu & Hughes 2014)³. Defenders of the surveys argue that the questions asked of subjects make no judgement about them, wherever they live, choose to interpret the questions or what they decide makes them happy. Veenhoven (2008:6) concedes that an individual in an Asian country may reflect on different domains in order to provide a life satisfaction rating but argues that ‘questions based on the idea- do we all assess how much we like our life?’ is universally applicable ‘as the non-response rate to questions about happiness is typically low’. But cultural variance may highlight an even bigger problem of variance between individuals, making like-for like comparisons problematic. As critics like Mathews (2012), Eichorn

³ Research by Oishi (et al 2013) has shown that social harmony and interdependence are emphasised more in subjective perceptions of happiness in Asian countries like Japan and individual happiness downplayed, whereas in Western countries, particularly the USA, individuals tend to overreport their happiness levels due to the cultural significance attached to personal fulfilment.

(2014) and Thin (2012) have pointed out, John's self-rating of four may be different to Colin's four, while 60 years old Kevin's seven might signify something different to 20 year old Maria's.

Advocates of these surveys do acknowledge some of the epistemological problems of the SWB construct. Vagaries of mood, where happiness questions appear in the list of questions in a survey and memory bias all can potentially hinder construct validity (Oishi et al 2013; Pavot & Diener 2013). Problems of 'impression management' (ESRC 2012) whereby subjects work towards what they consider a socially acceptable or average response, or filter their responses through a 'social desirability' or 'conformity bias', of what they consider to fit a social norm has led Thin (2012) and Mathews (2012) to suggest that happiness should be understood as a social construct, mediated by social practices and values. Happiness data may obscure as much as it reveals-- the 'happy person' is arguably one who has 'a feel for the game' in making use of available resources and 'not everyone has equal access to these' (Hyman 2014:2). While a trans-historical notion of happiness as an individual, practical accomplishment or at the very least an meaningful aspect of personhood may override and transcend cultural and discursive boundaries (Veenhoven 2008; Nussbaum 1999), critics, like Ahmed (2010 & Davies 2015), have deemed happiness a form of compliance with what is deemed worthy and legitimate – in contemporary, western society this means an internalised, individualistic enterprise based around maximising self-interest. This may also lead to 'a societal pressure to appear happy and contented- what we have come to understand as normal' (Hyman 2014:2).

If such is the case, then what does the SWB data actually track? If, as Sen (2001 in Alkire 2015:4) asserts, 'deprived people often tend to adjust their desires and expectations to what little they see as feasible (and) train themselves to take pleasure in small mercies', then adaptive preferences can often obscure both injustices and negative changes in objective conditions (Austin 2015). And the principle works both ways. If individuals habituate to improved conditions, so they can to reduced ones. Where the happiness self-report doesn't reflect these changing conditions, it might not be the best measure of the levels of good in people's lives (Walker & Kavedžija 2015).

A radical approach to these problems has led some researchers to construct methodologies that do away with the evaluative component of SWB altogether, for example Kahneman's (2006) 'Day Reconstruction Method' (DRM) where research subjects are asked at regular intervals to relate incidents and experiences where they felt happy or unhappy. Since this method too requires some cognitive work, the search for objective measurements of subjective wellbeing have led other researchers (e.g. Oswald 2015) to identify physiological happiness evidence through measuring levels of cortisol and through electroencephalogram (EEG) recordings.

However, this may be a case of compounding a problem by trying to solve it. The reason that complexities arise when people evaluate their life satisfaction is because it is 'a function of several factors: people's values, frames of reference, objective state...their knowledge of alternatives' (Alkire 2015:4). Thin-sliced numerical representations of this evaluation seems insufficient because it decontextualizes and separates the experience of happiness from what it is about, what people care about and how people's notion of what it is may be plotted across the life-course rather than captured in a single moment (Thin 2012; Tiberius 2013).

Argyle (2001:17) argues that SWB 'is a real state, and is indeed objective in that it corresponds to actual states of the brain, actual facial expressions and actual behaviours of various kinds'. Even critics of SWB acknowledge that much of the data emerging from these studies correspond well with objective quality of life measures around health, employment and social relationships (Thin 2012; Mathews 2012; Cieslik 2017). However, this hardly seems to warrant Cummins' (2013) nonchalant dismissal as a pointless enterprise efforts to at the very least supplement quantitative data with more in-depth interpretive insights.

Furthermore, these insights may reveal more critical and nuanced positions about the nature and pursuit of happiness than SWB researchers allow for. Kahneman's DRM underscores the problem of separating descriptions of happiness from the complex ways people may think about it. In a study (Kahneman et al 2004) where 900 women in Texas, USA indicated enjoyments they derived from interacting with other people, spending time with one's children was fourth, behind, in ascending order, partners, other relatives and friends. Yet, when people are asked, children and partners are consistently cited as the chief source of individual happiness (Thin 2014) in their lives as a whole. So either they get this wrong because the stories they tell themselves don't correlate with lived experience (Dolan 2014), or, more revealingly, happiness does not necessarily correlate with a greater frequency of positive emotions or satisfactions, illustrating that often actors may choose and commit to what is meaningful and important (but might be challenging) over what is necessarily pleasurable (Seligman 2011).

This complexity underscores a wider problem of ignoring a fundamental 'second sense' of happiness that relates both to the way that people think critically about the concept, including its ephemeral nature, or the way it is interwoven with themes of duty, sacrifice and commitment (Cieslik 2014). This in turn problematises a reductive notion of a person pursuing an object of utility, that is, to gain the maximum good/pleasure and the least amount of bad/pain from any activity or aim (Tiberius 2013).

Therefore, concerns about the way happiness is measured are not solely epistemological. They are also about the way happiness is being conceptualised as an entity that exists as a higher or lower quantity at a particular point of time. Cieslik (2014:5) argues that while 'survey approaches have generated some valuable insights...the quantitative methodologies that have tended to dominate this work...can abstract from more nuanced everyday experiences of happiness'.

Happiness in the Policy Arena

Similar problems are encountered when aggregating happiness self-reports and calling the sum 'national happiness'. Most happiness scholars welcome politicians' rhetoric about finding alternative measures of social progress beyond economic growth, agreeing with ex-Prime Minister David Cameron that 'the relentless search for a rise in GDP sometimes trampled over a government's other goals, such as sustainability and work-life balance' (Guardian 2009). It is hard to find many opposed to 'the movement away from GDP fetishism...towards social indicators' (Austin 2015:2).

Unfortunately, as Austin (2015:1) argues, the constructs of GDP and SWB share a 'common heritage and mutual compatibility' because they are both wedded to a utility-based theory of human motivation based around preference satisfaction (Walker & Kavedžija 2015). There is a deep irony here. Happiness economists departed from the principle of GDP not only because it neglects other social goods but also because of doubts about the rational-choice theory of motivation behind it — individuals make sensible and informed decisions in the marketplace. Yet by relying on an equally thin-sliced numerical standard, SWB, to replace GDP, they make the same commitment to rational choice. Therefore, a rejection of economic orthodoxy implied by critiques of GDP is not simply a technical issue about what to measure, but a more fundamental one about what kind of beings humans are (Nussbaum 2011).

To a large degree, perspectives on political involvement in happiness depend upon how happiness is defined in the first place. Criticisms levelled at Government-backed happiness measures are often linked to its utilitarian emphasis, that increasing the total amount of pleasure and satisfactions represented by SWB is not only a moral duty of government, but, equally problematic, that this aim is on top of a hierarchy of goods. As with individual happiness and wellbeing, the concept of national wellbeing is not just a descriptive one about how many people are satisfied but a normative one about the kind of society we want to see. As Baggini (Guardian 2012) has noted, 'If you look at the countries that do best in surveys of wellbeing, they haven't got there by having these (happiness) indices. They've got there by agreeing what priorities should be'.

Subsequently, a lack of data about social priorities is potentially obscuring a more critical and nuanced debate about conceptualising or increasing national wellbeing. As the ONS' (2011) own summary of the results of its public consultation into establishing a Wellbeing index makes clear, respondents not only made a distinction between what's good for them and for society as a whole, some common themes emerged as national wellbeing priorities. These included 'the quality and availability of Government provided services such as healthcare...the common feeling that there should be a greater sense of fairness and equality for the sake of our national well-being...the belief that measures of national well-being could signal a move away from consumerism and towards greater social equality' (ONS 2011). Other research (Dolan 2011; Jones 2015; AFH 2014) shows evidence of lay perspectives viewing an increase in general wellbeing as contingent on adopting policies to produce greater equality or to safeguard essential services, perceived to be important in their own right.

No measures of equality or public service provision have found their way into the current UK wellbeing measure. This partly illustrates a problem with the term; "national wellbeing" being sufficiently opaque for interested parties to project their version of the public good onto (Walker & Kavedžija 2015). Debates about national wellbeing are not merely 'normative' but ideological, and are likely to reflect the belief-systems of politicians who commission them. When interpretive methodologies *are* employed, for example in the ONS's (2011) public consultation, 'there was considerable scepticism about the measure...much of the online discussion was around the complexity of wellbeing' (ONS 2011). In Dolan's (2011:12) research 'respondents believed that government should focus on promoting the conditions for happiness rather than directly trying to influence happiness'.

But Dolan's analysis of this finding shows how economists have fundamentally failed to escape their utility-based framework. Rather than acknowledge critical and nuanced reflections from his research cohort about the limits and roles of governments, he simply concludes that this reflects an unwarranted pessimism about the efficacy of the measure which greater publicity about its benefits would shift. Dolan's findings also undermine the principles behind the SWB measure that depict individuals as self-interested happiness maximisers. His thematic analysis of reasoning behind numerical self-reports revealed how respondents sought relationships or achievements not as instruments to increase their happiness but as ends in themselves. But to understand this better, and the belief-systems that frame these debates, some exploration of the way conflicting happiness definitions draw on historical ideas reaching back over 2500 years is required.

Definitions of Happiness in Historical Context

The rationale in tracing the historical roots of happiness is partly because so much of the contemporary literature refers explicitly to it but also how happiness data ‘sheds empirical light’ (McMahon 2006:470) on ideas expressed in historical texts. These texts therefore comprise a substantial reference point for understanding some of the tensions in defining and prescribing happiness. This is illustrated by the many introductions to the topic in academic papers and books that begin with discussing the (seemingly) opposed conceptions (see Vitterso 2016 for an excellent overview of this binary approach) of utilitarian and eudemonic approaches in relation to, on the one hand, operationalising happiness as a measurable entity associated with the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham and, on the other, capturing some normative dimension of the good life or ‘flourishing’ chiefly associated with the classical Greek philosopher Aristotle. So influential are these two figures that many authors simply use the shorthand ‘Benthamite’ and ‘Aristotelean’ to encapsulate on the one hand a ‘hedonic’ happiness tradition which emphasises the moral value in the individualistic pursuit of positive emotions and conversely a more social and processual ‘eudemonic’ happiness that valorises a life of meaning and purpose.

One confusion lies with the term happiness itself, as different writers use the same word to convey very different meanings (Vitterso 2016). Bentham’s belief that happiness is the main aim of life seems almost identical to Aristotle’s (2004:15) statement that ‘happiness is the supreme good’. Despite the many and conflicting definitions and ideas about happiness, as Carlisle (Guardian 2010) notes, ‘in the western philosophical tradition, reflections on what the best kind of life might be have almost always acknowledged that happiness is something we all desire’. But what Blackburn (2001:81) calls the ‘modern’ idea of happiness ‘sketched as a purely subjective or internal pleasure...a string of satisfying inner sensation’ draws on a hedonic tradition that has, in the main, discriminated between higher and lower pleasures within an ethical and prudential framework (McMahon 2006).

Hedonic happiness is broadly defined as the experience and sensation of pleasure and positive emotions (Argyle 2001; Diener 2008; White 2006) and seems to contain an implicit value judgement: human subjects prefer pleasure to pain, so pleasure acts as an internal guidance system. The classical Greek philosopher Epicurus is widely regarded as the “Father” of the hedonic tradition (McMahon 2006) but hedonics – simply, feeling pleasure, is often confused with hedonism, pursuing pleasure from moment to moment. In fact Epicurus’ (2013) writings could hardly be deemed to be supporting a moment-by-moment hedonism, advocating discretion in the types of pleasure to be pursued, moderating appetite and adjusting desire to means (Vitterso 2016) to produce a state of

mental tranquillity (Walker & Kavedžija 2015). 'Epicureanism' has been immortalised by the Roman poet Horace: 'seize the day, trusting as little as possible in the next day' (Horace 1997:211 in McMahon 2006:71). But Horace's 'Carpe Diem' is not the self-revolution depicted in contemporary culture, more a cautionary tale: take pleasures where you can, for life is uncertain. And the types of pleasures Horace favours are immediately recognisable within that very contemporary leisure trope of busy urbanites: the virtues of escaping the city for the countryside, connecting with nature, enjoying wine with friends and slowing down the pace of life (McMahon 2006).

Undoubtedly, modern expectations of the amounts of pleasure that can be taken and enjoyed are greater than in Horace's day (Walker & Kavedžija 2015; McMahon 2006). The historical emphasis on the central role of fortune, particularly how the fickle finger of fate could make a mockery not just of social status and material abundance but of any contented state of being (McMahon 2013; Walker & Kavedžija 2015; Nussbaum 2001) jars with the much stronger belief of contemporary Western cultures that individuals can control their destiny (Thin 2012). This belief may be a cultural construction whereby 'people learn early in life to tell stories in which self-motivating actors produce all significant changes in the situation through their own efforts' (Taylor 2011:113) that may have produced what McMahon (2006:464) terms 'a new form of unhappiness' – the inability of actors to achieve these happy lives sold to them as readily available. Even two key advocates, Martin Seligman (2002) and Jonathon Haidt (2006), of 'Positive Psychology', whose basic doctrine is that individuals by dint of their own efforts can increase the amount of happiness they experience, are careful to also emphasise the limited control humans can exert over their circumstances.

The capricious and ephemeral nature of happiness finds its fullest expression in the ancient philosophy of Stoicism (Sellars 2006). Stoicism recommends cultivating an attitude of resilience to the vagaries of fortune, and crucially, not becoming dependent of external sources of pleasure (Burkeman 2012; Vitterso 2016). One of the best-known theorizers of Stoicism, the Roman philosopher Seneca, declared a person happy 'whom nothing makes less strong than he is, leaning upon none but himself; for one who sustains himself by any prop must fall' (Seneca 2016:2). This insistence on preserving some internal dignity and fortitude in the face of shifting fortune to some degree aligns with modern conceptions of happiness as an internal project. Stoic ideas are also key features of contemporary notions of 'resilience' (Young Foundation 2010) while contemporary approaches to mental health, particularly CBT, are rooted in Stoic concepts (Burkeman 2012). Elements of stoicism also resonate for Cieslik's (2017) interviewees, who are aware, through their struggles to live a good and decent life, of the essential fragility of any seemingly accomplished level of well-being.

Although subjective pleasure as conceptualised and measured in the SWB construct makes no attempts to differentiate or discriminate in terms of its quality, other key facets of current happiness research, including 'adaptive preference' and 'social comparison' are about the illusions of seeking 'permanent satisfaction of the tormenting desires' (Schopenhauer 2012:246) through external (and particularly material) goods, a recurring theme in historical accounts. In the first Western text that addresses the concept of happiness, Herodotus' Histories (2003:6), the philosopher Solon dismisses King Croesus' assumptions that as the wealthiest man alive he must also be the happiest in terms we would probably recognise: 'he who possesses great store of riches is no nearer happiness than he who has what suffices for his daily needs'.

Therefore, a historical perspective illustrates the continuity as much as the contrasts between older and modern concepts, offering a corrective to what theorists consider to be concerns unique to modern societies. The concept of adaptive preference as something revealed by the 'new science' of happiness was predicted centuries ago by figures including Rousseau, Adam Smith and DeTocqueville (McMahon 2006). This relates to both the ephemeral nature of hedonic happiness in general, 'happiness leaves us; or we leave it' (Rousseau 1991 cited in McMahon 2006:237), and to material goods in particular. The rise of a materialistic, consumerist society emerging from the 18th century onwards, would, predicted Rousseau, leave individuals 'adrift in a material luxury that multiplied false needs' (McMahon 2006:237) resulting in a frustrated, 'fleeting state which leaves our hearts still empty and anxious' (Rousseau 1979:87 in McMahon 2006:236). Anticipating the Easterlin paradox, Adam Smith (2009:172 & 181) viewed the engine of economic growth as 'the deception which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind...enchanted with the distant idea of felicity' when in reality 'in prosperity, after a certain time...the mind of every man returns to its natural or usual state'. So, as McMahon (2006:470) points out, what the 'new science' of happiness research has achieved is to 'shed empirical light on some of these phenomena' rather than introducing new concepts into our understanding.

Thinkers like Rousseau were essentially pessimists about the burgeoning individualistic, materialistic cultures they saw developing around them. But others were more optimistic. Driven by the Enlightenment era (Walker & Kavedžija 2015; Davies 2015), the late 18th and early 19th centuries marked a watershed moment. The philosophy of happiness from the enlightenment onwards was a belief that individuals 'could – and should- expect happiness in the form of good feeling and pleasure as a right of life' (McMahon 2013:256).

Utilitarianism and Hedonic Happiness

Even more radical, famously encapsulated in the US declaration of Independence, was the idea that governments should promote their population's happiness. A key theory in this development is the utilitarian philosophy of Bentham's 'felicific calculus', the greatest happiness of the greatest number, where the moral worth of any action is that it maximises pleasure and minimises pain. Dismissing abstract concepts such as human rights or ethics as 'nonsense on stilts' (Bentham 2003:38) Bentham allocates to pleasure the central role in morality, justified by his belief that pleasure is the central motivation of all human activity. Any action, Bentham believed, could be defined as morally good if it increased the amount of experienced pleasure. By extension, Governments had a moral duty to seek the greatest happiness for its population (McMahon 2013; White 2006), their policies deemed good to the extent that these increased the ratio of aggregate pleasure over pain. Because any object of utility is good so long as it produces the greatest pleasure possible, the conflation of pleasure with virtue forms the cornerstone of Bentham's philosophy (Vitterso 2016).

There is something attractively democratic in Bentham's ideas (Layard 2011). All pleasures are equal. All people's pleasures are equal too. Applied to say Bourdieu's (1986) concept of habitus where class divisions are reinforced by judgements about taste, Bentham seems to be emphasising caution about judging which and whose pleasures are deemed superior. But by adopting neutrality about the content and character of pleasure, and making subjectivism a moral theory, Bentham left himself open to criticism (Blackburn 2001). Pleasure, for instance, can be derived from harmful and duplicitous behaviour, which could be considered 'a vice to be overcome, not a true source of happiness' (Sandel 2010:196). Individuals may also be ignorant or wilfully disregarding of their needs (Manning 2008), for example a drug addict's short-term gratification works against their longer-term quality of life.

For Bentham's critics, "greatest happiness" is not a sufficient moral end because happiness as pleasure is not good in itself- some contingent ethical and prudential framework is required (Vitterso 2016; Sen 1999). For what if, as Blackburn (2001:83) imagines, desires or satisfactions 'were trashy, stoked up by false promises and allurements, motivated by vanity...induced by playing on fear and fantasy...or lead to further pleasures being destroyed?'. Equally, someone's contentment could be self-satisfied, selfish, ignorant, misinformed or aggressive. "True" happiness, therefore 'requires some correct relationship with our world. It cannot be gained by stoking up sensations within...a succession of pleasures, a life of endless release of endorphins would surely not be seen as a happy life' (Blackburn 2001:83).

It's all very well a Cambridge University Professor not thinking Bentham's ideas are up to scratch, or, jumping back a few millennia, a Roman Senator dismissing the 'cattle like pleasure' (Seneca 2016:5) of the multitude, or a French aristocrat fearing 'an innumerable crowd of men, alike and equal, turned in upon themselves in a restless search for those petty and vulgar pleasures with which they fill their souls' (DeTocqueville 2003:805). But in fact, one of the most fundamental and enduring objections to hedonic utility is that positioning people as self-interested maximisers doesn't speak to them fully as subjects (Plummer 2001; Sayer 2011). As previously explored through qualitative studies (Dolan 2011; ONS 2011), there seems to be something about this that many people instinctively reject. Like Blackburn they feel deflated, perhaps it seems alienating, or too thin – a human being is not a calculator after all (Tombs 2015).

So while utility may offend notions of the richness of human motivations in the minds of philosophers, equally the idea that the greatest happiness may not necessarily be good in itself also emerges from lay accounts. Individuals may want to be happy, but they are not entirely neutral about how they get there. One example of empirical research which illustrates this is Dolan's (2011) thought experiment – most of his respondents were reluctant to take a happiness pill to increase positive emotions. These findings are consistent with those from a similar experiment, 'Nozick's happiness machine' (in Tiberius 2013) where respondents are asked if they would like to be connected up to a machine generating pleasurable sensations and that during this they would also be unaware that their experiences were mechanically derived. Three quarters of respondents preferred the authenticity of real life to the induced and artificial happiness. Ignorance might be bliss, but, offered this escape route, respondents were concerned with having a real experience in addition to wanting the feelings associated with it.

Another empirical study that appears to show how "paternalistic" notions of higher and lower pleasure are more in tune with everyday perceptions is Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) research into 'experienced pleasure'. This led him to devise the concept of 'Flow' that identifies differences in the quality and depth of pleasure, between sensory or bodily pleasure (like eating) which is essentially fleeting, non-developmental and which produces displeasure if over-indulged (like eating too much) and the 'state of total immersion in a task that is challenging and closely matched to ones abilities...what people sometimes call being in the zone' (Haidt 2006:123). At a more elevated level, this experience can seem transcendent in ways that can be traced to Schopenhauer's (2012) notion of the 'sublime'.

The types of experiences that produce flow include physical exertion, creative pursuits and those involving other people- all requiring some effort and commitment. This led another psychologist,

Martin Seligman (2002:102), to draw a distinction between pleasures, 'that have clear sensory and strong emotional components', and gratifications, that 'ask more of us: they challenge us and make us extend ourselves'. In other words, the things that produce the deepest satisfaction are the things pursued for their own sake and not for the sake of pleasure. This also says something about the elusive nature of satisfactions- its properties mean that it's hard to obtain directly. But the wider implications of Csikszentmihalyi's research is perhaps that we should 'devote ourselves to activities we deem meaningful...the pursuit of purposeful activity is almost always difficult...but, in the end, perhaps the best way to find happiness may be look for something else' (McMahon 2013:252).

Objections to utilitarianism centred on the ethics and the quality of hedonic happiness and its position on top of a hierarchy of goods led many self-professed utilitarians that came after Bentham to qualify the seemingly value-free implications of his ideas (Blackburn 2001). Mill, for example, famously drew a distinction between higher and lower pleasures by stating 'better Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied' (Mill 1998:157 in McMahon 2006:349). Contemporary academics and organisations who are advocates of applying the greater happiness principle to areas such as public policy also tend to justify the principle by introducing other values, particular the wider social benefits (for examples, see Action for Happiness website & Layard 2011) such initiatives would bring. However, this inability to be completely neutral about ends, and the introduction of some contingent ethical and prudential framework, in attempting to rescue utility ends up rather undermining it, 'muddying the water by introducing some other source of value than pleasure itself' (Blackburn 2001:82).

Eudemonic Happiness

This recurring theme, that while writers are prepared to state that happiness is the ultimate goal of life, very few are neutral about the quality of that end, is a key pillar of the eudemonic happiness tradition (Vitterso 2016). Eudemonic ('good spirit' in Ancient Greek) happiness emphasises fulfilling or flourishing lives grounded in concrete experiences and practices – personal achievement, ethical conduct and participation in society (Dean 2009; Sandel 2010; Vitterso 2016) – over and above how a person may be feeling at any particular moment. The happy person in eudemonic terms spills over into normative concepts of a good life because 'we sometimes need to be able to say that activities are worthwhile or that things are worth having in a sense which has to be distinguished from that which refers to maximum happiness' (Telfer 1980:42) and constitutes a rejection of happiness as a purely subjective, internal state phenomenon (Vitterso 2016).

Eudemonic concepts are anchored to questions about meaning-in-life (Thin 2012) which may be distinct from the experience of pleasure. As Seligman (2011:11) makes clear, 'we often choose what

makes us feel good, but it is very important to realize that often our choices are not made for the sake of how we will feel'. Countering utilitarian assumptions that individuals' principal motivation is the pursuit of pleasure, Seligman is a good example of someone whose original ideas about increasing positive emotions as the ultimate good in people's lives foundered on the rocks of critical feedback from his students and readership. His previous theory was wrong, he says, because happiness is not simply about compiling a bigger pile of satisfactions and pleasures.

Therefore, the eudemonic tradition extends the concept of happiness beyond subjective affect towards a fuller and rounded concept which can accommodate a variety of goods. In this respect it represents a value-pluralism that can't be measured by one item alone (Walker & Kavedžija 2015). Aristotle, the key historical figure of the eudemonic tradition, like Bentham, believed that happiness 'is what is desired and sought by all men' (Grayling 2003:31). Like Bentham, Aristotle sees no distinction between happiness and ethics – a good person is a happy person. However he views a happy person as one that has lived life well, attaining the highest good attainable, not the most pleasure, which he sees as somewhat 'slavish' (Aristotle 2004:4).

For Aristotle (2004:16), there was no mythical end point of happiness – 'one swallow does not make a summer' – it was the striving that counted, believing it was hard to call a man happy until he died. However, he claims he would be defending a philosopher's paradox if one denied that someone is happy in the present, or if he were to claim (like some of his Stoic contemporaries) that 'provided he is good, a man is happy on the rack or surrounded by great disaster' (ibid:195). Equally, while in his famous phrase he called happiness 'an activity of the soul expressing virtue' (ibid:16), he recognised that virtue on its own is not enough to achieve happiness: 'someone might possess virtue but still suffer the worst evils and misfortunes' (ibid:195). Aristotle stressed that a happy life involved some luck, good health, good relationships, favourable external conditions and the capability to think for oneself. So while 'granting virtue a central place in the attainment of happiness' (McMahon 2006:47), he recognised that this also required the 'unimpeded exercise of a faculty... psychological advantages as well as external goods and the gift of fortune' so a person 'may not be hampered by the lack of these things' (Aristotle 2004:195).

Virtue for Aristotle is simply excellent practice in any given activity (Sandel 2010). The virtue of any practice, Aristotle considered, was in the excellence of its functioning. Therefore, a virtuous builder is one that strives to develop excellence in his craft. His virtues refer to a whole variety of excellences in how we treat others and develop our skills and capacities. Happiness, therefore, is the craftsmanship of life. To Aristotle this craftsmanship was much like becoming a decent flute player: it required practice (Aristotle 2001). To the end of crafting a happy life, individuals must develop what

he termed 'phronesis', practical reason gained through experience (Aristotle was consequentially sceptical of the ability of young people to display wisdom, his treatise is for those 'who have seen something of the world, felt its sharp corners, tasted success and defeat' (Grayling 2003:30)). He believed that virtues, like crafts, are acquired through practice and habitation: 'we become just by performing just acts and brave by performing brave ones' (Grayling 2003:31).

One of the main attractions of his ideas is their being grounded within everyday practices and contexts. 'Aristotle viewed happiness much more as a concrete, grounded activity whereby individuals make ongoing choices about how best to live their daily lives' (Cieslik 2014:5). Instead of Bentham's human calculator, Aristotle's individual is a fallible but committed actor, facing difficult decisions whose outcome is uncertain, keenly aware that unhappiness is often derived from the same objects that produce the most satisfaction. Neither could abstract ethical principles necessarily show the best way to go about things, as 'applications to particular problems admits of no precision...agents are compelled at every step to think out for themselves what the circumstances demand' (Grayling 2003:33).

Central to this navigation was what Aristotle termed praxis – 'action intended towards some good' (Smith 2011:1). This meant firstly being able to think about a situation 'in the light of our understanding of what is good or what makes for human flourishing' (Smith 2011:2), to be able to 'deliberate rightly about what is advantageous for himself' and 'what is conducive to the good life generally' (ibid). These purposive ends are different to the 'consequentialist' ends in Bentham's ethics: actions are guided by a disposition of concern about human wellbeing as opposed to a rational calculation to increase its sum. In general, Aristotle supposed, the right response in any given situation consisted of adopting dispositions that were a mean or middle course between two extremes. Aristotle explains the 'golden mean', as 'conduct...incompatible with excess or deficiency in feelings and actions...both eating too little and eating too much destroy health...whereas the right quantity produces, increases and preserves it' (Aristotle 2004:24).

Recognising that happiness would be shaped by the materials at our disposal, and that failure is possible in many ways, for 'it is easy to miss the target and difficult to hit it' (Aristotle 2004:41), practical wisdom would be attained in the same way any difficult skill is developed, implying trial and error along the way. Aristotle was also not totally naïve in assuming that in any given circumstance we would necessarily be disposed to act with concern for others' wellbeing, recognising that rationality and irrationality were not only in dialogue but in direct conflict, that desires and distortions could override practical reason and that individuals would consciously choose vice over virtue, where a person 'sees the better but does the worse' (Grayling 2003:32). Aristotle therefore

‘makes room for weakness of will’ (Grayling 2003:33) through understanding that merely knowing about ‘acts that are just and admirable and good...does not make us any more capable of doing them...because something else should overmaster it and drag it about like a slave’ (Aristotle 2004:169&182). All these factors could conspire to make it difficult in ‘estimating advantage with respect to the right object, the right means and the right time’ (ibid 159).

While declaring that ‘pleasure is not the good...there are many things we should be eager to have even if they brought no pleasure with them- sight, memory, knowledge and other excellences’ (ibid: 260), Aristotle understood the often intelligent way in which humans pursue pleasure, declaring that it must be taken seriously, because ‘consciousness of pleasure has grown up with all of us since our infancy...our life is so deeply imbued with this feeling...that pleasure and pain are the standards by which we regulate our conduct’ (ibid:36). However, in contrast to hedonic utility where a life’s worth would be calculated by the extent to which pleasure was experienced over pain, he recognised that pleasure was not always good, nor pain always bad. Applying his notion of the Golden Mean to this question, he described the person ‘who pursues excessive pleasures and avoids moderate pains’ (ibid: 177) as ‘incontinent’- some countenance of discomfort is vital as well as inevitable. The key is the disposition adopted towards feelings, so that one is ‘liable to feel pleasure but not to be carried away by it’ (ibid: 189). The excellence of pleasure, in Aristotelean terms ‘does not consist of aggregating pleasures and pains but in aligning them, so that we delight in noble things and take pain in base ones’ (Sandel 2010:196).

Blackburn (2001) criticises Aristotle for naively assuming that pleasure would follow virtue. Anticipating the obvious counter that people who cheat or do harm may also feel pleasure, Aristotle argues that ‘they may be pleasant to persons of unhealthy disposition, but that does not compel us to believe that they are really pleasant (except to that person) any more than sweet things taste bitter to sick people’ (Aristotle 2004:259). He also doubted whether individuals (and by extension, governments) could pursue satisfactions and pleasures directly: ‘it is possible to pass into a state of pleasure quickly, but not to actualise that state oneself’ (ibid:259). Proper pleasures are those ‘that become attached to the activity in virtue of itself...but does not need pleasure attached to it as a kind of accessory’ (ibid:20). Therefore, the role of pleasure is how it ‘perfects the activity...not by being immanent but as a sort of supervising perfection, like the bloom that graces the flower of youth’ (ibid:263).

Of the many attractions of Aristotle’s ideas, his eudemonia ‘is an active kind of wellbeing and well-doing- a much richer notion than what is generally now meant by happiness, where one could make everyone happy by tampering with the water supply’ (Grayling 2003:310). Because his

‘objective account of the human good (is combined with) sensitivity to the actual circumstances of human life and choice in all their multiplicity, variety and mutability’ (Nussbaum & Sen 1993 242-243), eudemonic happiness is not rigidly prescriptive, individuals (and cultures) can develop the good in their way. His strength is in identifying ‘a sphere of human experience that figures in more or less any human life, and in which more or less any human beings will have to make some choices rather than others’ (Nussbaum & Sen 1993:245).

Problematising a Historical Focus

Because they resonate with contemporary debates about the good life, Aristotle’s ideas continue to exert a strong power. However, the emphasis on ‘features of humaneness that lie beneath all local traditions’ (Nussbaum 1999:3) that suggest some kind of universal human concern that transcends cultural barriers and historic epochs has been problematized for neglecting the socio-genetic emergence of happiness as a culturally-situated entity. Socio-genesis ‘refers simultaneously to the development of particular understandings, distinctions... and to the concomitant development of the particular social conditions under which these take form’ (Jugureanu & Hughes 2010:2), suggesting that the search for an ‘unchanging, all-encompassing definition of happiness involves the epistemological fallacy that happiness has a kind of essence that can be rendered conceptually’ (Jugureanu & Hughes 2010:2).

These arguments are persuasive with regards to methodologies that casts happiness as a decontextualized ‘thing’ or the idea that ‘happiness is one of several basic emotions that reside in us all’ (Jugureanu & Hughes 2010:2). But to re-cast happiness as ‘more a question of the social development of a pervasive discourse’ (Jugureanu & Hughes 2010:2) seems to miss an important dimension, of an extremely durable, portmanteau concept about the nature of a good life which echoes through historical writings and across cultures (Walker & Kavedžija 2015). ‘The rise of the understanding and application of happiness as a technical concept that has been operationalised in relation to a range of social scientific fields and disciplines’ (Jugureanu & Hughes 2010:2) has emerged through particular conditions of modern societies. However, even these accounts, to gain legitimacy, feel the need to engage with the historic, philosophical literature to develop the theoretical frameworks that steer operationalisation. Another important objection concerns happiness as a hegemonic socio-cultural production (Ahmed (2010)). After all, historical accounts in the western tradition were written almost exclusively by white, male property owners. But perhaps, instead of dismissing their ideas because, for example, Aristotle justifies the institution of slavery or Mill fears popular democracy, we should find fault with the boundaries they drew and not the ideas themselves.

In liberal democracies where the rights of individuals to choose their life and the duty of governments to safeguard those rights are enshrined (McMahon 2013), many scholars have sought to protect subjective descriptions of happiness from prescriptive debates about the good life. But decoupling happiness from these critical questions has produced a narrow concept that stresses how important happiness is while saying very little about it -- why and in what ways it matters to people, and essentially being incurious about what people think about it all (Thin 2012).

Paradoxically, this seemingly value-free science is anchored to an extremely prescriptive moral theory, utilitarianism, that depicts actors as pleasure maximisers (Bentham 2003). If researchers are proposing that descriptive data be used to calculate the overall good of a nation, the sum of which Governments should try to increase, then this itself is a normative assertion and not a neutral position (Walker & Kavedžija 2015; Austin 2015).

But when asked, respondents in surveys are unable to be completely neutral about the ends of greater happiness (AFH 2014; Dolan 2011; ONS 2011). They believe Governments ought to provide beneficial conditions rather than try to make people happy, they see the general good as being more than the sum of individual satisfactions and believe that Governments should provide services based not on how much happiness they generate but because they are goods in themselves. These glimpses of more complex and nuanced perceptions seem to align lay perspectives more closely with the eudemonic tradition. While most people would assert the right for others to choose their own happiness and are wary about being over-judgemental, it may be that this avowal is more conditional than we might suppose, particularly when increasing the aggregate of subjectively defined happiness of a whole society is proposed as both a good in itself and the summum bonum of Government policy.

Sociological Approaches to Happiness

‘Without understanding or being unable to identify the presence of various kinds of suffering and flourishing, social science cannot develop adequate accounts of social life’ (Sayer 2011:10).

Hyman (2014:3) has termed happiness and sociology ‘the odd couple’, further noting that ‘despite its societal ubiquity, happiness has not been a popular area of enquiry’. Sociology’s examination of pathologies -- crime, sexism, racism, class-based inequalities -- has ‘marginalised research that wishes to focus on a broader spectrum of positive as well as negative experiences’ (Cieslik 2014:1). As evidenced by a special ‘happiness’ edition of Sociological Research Online (2014), in recent years sociologists (Bartram 2012; Cieslik 2014; Hyman 2014) and anthropologists (Mathews 2012; Thin 2012) have called for a robust sociological engagement with happiness. ‘Popular culture is saturated with happiness and wellbeing’ (Hyman 2011:5) while ideas about greater happiness and social

wellbeing appear to have captured the imagination of policy makers. But left to economists and psychologists who have largely framed the debate, happiness has become rooted in narrow utilitarian conceptions, while the tendency of sociologists to see happiness 'as a personal or social problem and as a device to focus attention on the dark side of modernity...has meant that much of what is written about happiness becomes a vehicle for the analysis of suffering' (Cieslik 2014:5).

Classical sociological theories underpinned by a focus 'on negative feeling, rather than on happiness' (Hyman 2014:3) may help to explain this. One is Durkheim's (1990) 'anomie', conceptualising the alienated existence of individuals in capitalist societies and emphasising the cold impersonality of urbanised living based on mechanical ties and contractual relationships (Taylor 2011; Jones 2003). The resulting fragmentation and loss of collective solidarity would, Durkheim predicted, lead to anomie- dislocation and strain, endangering social order and what Giddens (1991) has termed 'ontological security', the psychological significance 'of perceived collective continuities' (Skey 2011: 22-23). In his famous (and contested) study on suicide, Durkheim (1990:113) states that 'whenever the individual disassociates himself from collective goals in order to seek only his own interest...the more vulnerable to self-destruction' he becomes.

One of sociology's foundational concerns was how the 'instrumental rationality' (Giddens & Sutton 2014) of increasingly bureaucratic societies 'left little room for emotion' (Hyman 2011:53). Denied the succour of spiritual outlets in a secularising society, these individuals would be condemned to futile materialist pursuits of the good life: 'modern societies were adept at creating new wants and desires and promoting an individualism that identifies the pursuit of materialistic goals as the route to happiness' (Cieslik 2014:4). Late Twentieth Century Sociology has continued to focus on this 'individualisation' (Bauman 2001) of society that valorises egotistic conceptions at the expense of social relationships, attachments and abandoning individuals to construct their own meanings through what Beck (1992) terms 'reflexive modernity' in an environment of heightened risk. The "individualisation thesis" claims that 'human lives have been extracted from the bonds of family, tradition, and social collectives, which once prescribed in detail how people were to behave' (Howard 2007:30). Subsequently, 'unprecedented freedom...has arrived, together with...unprecedented impotence' (Bauman 2001:99).

Overlaying the promotion of 'a subjective, autonomous individual who strives for personal fulfilment, with the capacity to do so via acts of choice' (Hyman 2011:38) is the way 'therapeutic language and practices have expanded into everyday life' (Furedi 2004:1). Therapeutic discourse assigns the contemporary individual to embark upon a project of the self towards personal happiness (Furedi 2004), developing a seemingly unique and personal 'style of living that will

maximise the worth of existence to themselves' (Rose 1996:157). This is being overseen by new 'engineers of the human soul' (Rose 1996:157) – therapists, self-help authors, yoga teachers, life coaches, lifestyle advisors and personal shoppers. Davies (2015) has also written about the way new forms of technology e.g. wellbeing and health apps promote self-monitoring and therapeutic oversight.

However, this promise of happiness through consumer goods and lifestyles creates the illusion of freedom and autonomy 'behind which lies a reality of restless citizens seeking out an elusive contented way of life' (Cieslik 2014:4). As the individual self becomes 'the central focus of social, moral and cultural preoccupation' (Cieslik 2014:4), individuals embark upon 'the performance of happiness' (Hothschild 1983 in Hyman 2011) – appearing happy and successfully pursuing happy lives are major responsibilities (Cieslik 2014).

Therefore, happiness may stand at the centre of people's lives but does so in the form of 'a societal pressure to appear happy and contented' (Hyman 2014:2). Social control is thus exerted, adopting Foucault's idea that power is expressed through the promotion of subjectivity rather than suppressing it (Hyman 2011), by individuals monitoring their own emotions, 'accentuating and celebrating the positive and downplaying or overcoming the difficult or distressing in order to fit in' (Hyman 2014:2). This constitutes 'a more subtly and pernicious form of domination...of people sleepwalking through life sedated by a shallow consumerism that offers false promises of lasting happiness' (Cieslik 2014:4).

One obvious objection to these narratives is their excessive bleakness. By accentuating the "dark side of modernity" the positives are simply overlooked (Thin 2014). No fully paid-up membership to the Whig school of history is required to construct a 'what has modernity ever done for us?' list of progressive developments over the last century or so that have arguably been conducive to human wellbeing. This overly negative view of modernity (Bartram 2012) is also problematic for its reductionist and alienating depiction of the human agent at the heart of the debate.

Firstly, individual attempts at fulfilment or personal goals are framed as social pathologies- the need to appear content. For Furedi (2004:23), therapeutic discourse provides a script 'through which individuals develop a distinct understanding of their selves' particularly how to monitor and manage one's own feelings, 'to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's own things and actions' (Mayer & Salovey 1993:433 in Hyman 2011:39). The problem is that this so-called 'contemporary script' is also a key feature of many historical accounts. As Cieslik (2014) makes clear, data emerging from qualitative studies illustrate the continuing relevance of classic writings and understandings of happiness that depict the concerns of actors emerging 'from the necessity of our

human interaction with our external environment' (Archer 2001:50) and everyday praxis 'whereby individuals have to make ongoing choices about how best to live their lives' (Cieslik 2014:8).

This is not to suggest that happiness is a trans-historical essentiality or a substantiality that can be isolated and captured. The concept is relational and contingent, but not only to its cultural context, also to objective conditions that matter to actors 'because of their capacity to flourish and suffer, be treated well or badly and their needs regarding these' (Sayer 2011:2). Archer (2001:20) contends that the tendency to externalise lay concerns as socio-cultural productions reflects a wider trend whereby agency itself has been 'de-centred and dissolved by a process of downward conflation whereby the individual is swallowed up by society or engulfed by discourse'. Consequently, positive descriptions of happiness tend to be dismissed as the unwitting absorption of powerful discourses or are externalised as products of an actor's social position. This neglects the evaluative and reflexive characteristics of agents grappling with and negotiating a range of motivations and pathways that are not simply reducible to these forms of 'cultural imperialism' (Sayer 2011).

Hyman (2011:6) for example sets out to investigate whether 'people tend to use a set of dominant discourses' when talking about happiness. Adopting Foucauldian ideas that statements are 'based upon a set of rules that prescribe which speech acts are to have meanings...specific to time periods and societies' (ibid 6), Hyman describes the way 'modern discourses oppress the individual subject' (King 2004:8) and often externalises the subjective interpretations and concerns about concrete experiences she generates from her interviewees to linguistic referents and rules. To be sure, individual accounts employ available linguistic properties, yet these accounts pertain to objects beyond language – re-description can't wish them away (Archer 2001). Therefore, 'there are limits to the extent to which we can rationalize or wish away harm, and fabricate a sense of well-being' (Sayer 2011:8) when the reference points of happiness evaluations often 'take the form of objective effects and characteristics'.

Sayer (2011) contends that if it is the rules that prescribe the speech acts, then actors are essentially reduced to cultural dopes, who uncritically and unreflexively internalise these discourses. But 'discourses, belief systems or cultures are usually rich enough to provide ways of questioning their own beliefs and to contain at least the possibilities of conflict or internal dissent as much as they seek to conventionalise attitudes' (Sayer 2011:14). Indeed, it is the negotiation and grappling with these that characterise Cieslik's empirical research on happiness – depictions of actors 'caught in powerful webs of language and practices offer little insight into resistance and coping strategies. Interviewees also spoke of how they came to challenge the internalised operation of dominant

conceptions of happiness – the self-disciplining that is a characteristic of a Foucauldian conception of happiness scripts’ (Cieslik 2014:8).

Another influential sociological theory is Bourdieu’s (1986) habitus, defined as ‘a set of (embodied) dispositions that individuals acquire through repeated practice and experience’ (Sayer 2011:75). Habitus is seen to impose upon the individual’ (King 2004:4) because the social world they inhabit is ‘complete and fully viable only if it is durably objectified not only in things...but also in bodies, in durable dispositions’ (Bourdieu 1990:58). Thus ‘society becomes deposited in persons in the form of ...trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them’ (Wacquant 2005:316 in Sayer 2011:75). In addition, depending on their social position, actors possess varying degrees of three types of capital- economic, social and cultural- resources that are converted to accumulate social distinction and power.

Sayer criticises Bourdieu for primarily viewing dispositions as expressions of social structures and the social positions actors occupy by virtue of the amounts of capital they possess. While it would be mistaken to depict these as unimportant factors - resources matters to people since happiness appraisals relate to objective circumstances- and acknowledging the power that social norms do have on people’s motivations and actions, Sayer (2011:4) is critical of Bourdieu’s failure to adequately acknowledge ‘actors’ reflexivity and their evaluative stance’. Externalising dispositions and judgements, he believes, neglects ‘normative rationales which matter greatly to actors, concerning what is of value, how to live, what is worth striving for and what is not’ (Sayer 2011:4) and ignores how appraisals spill over and sometimes override these forms of socialisation. Because actors are ‘sometimes capable of taking different views from the ones that fit these positions most comfortably’ (Sayer 2004:4), Sayer advocates extending the concept of the habitus ‘to include moral judgements as well as aesthetic and positional ones’ (Vaisey 2012:671).

Sociologists operating within this theoretical framework tend to view emotions as properties of unequal resource distribution (Barbalet 2002) and subsequently subjective motivations as a desire to accumulate capitals to accrue value (Hyman 2011). This conflation of individual disposition with social position can seem as deflatingly reductive as the ‘cultural dopes’ (Sayer 2004) of Discourse Theory – voluntary activities are interpreted as forms of ‘adding value’ or actors, through a ‘technology of the self...position themselves within an available discourse’ (Hyman 2011:6) and perform ‘a certain number of operations on their...thoughts, conducts and ways of being...in order to attain a certain state of happiness’ (Foucault 1988:18). Hyman (2014) adopts this idea to illustrate the way subjects used memories of positive experiences to boost their present emotional states, also stating that many of her interviewees have ‘consumed’ self-help books, interpreting this as

individuals maximising a resource to accrue value for the self. The notion that people seek out ideas and learning because they have any internal value (MacIntyre 1981), because they enjoy them or because wisdom is sought for its own sake, or indeed their circumstances that prompted this, becomes obscured.

Although constraints related to resource availability and various discursive forms 'may appear to be problematic and oppressive' (Sayer 2007:96), qualitative research can also 'illustrate the many different ways that people navigate constraints and conflicts in an effort to flourish' (Cieslik 2014:12). By neglecting the critical, reflexive capacities of agents 'whose values and ethical conduct appear as crude reflections of wider discourses and value systems' (Cieslik 2014:6), a potential sociological contribution to happiness which could examine the interplay between structure and agency has been delimited by, on the one hand, over-socialising individuals and, on the other, embracing a conceptualisation of agency that seem as deflatingly egotistic as utilitarian theories.

In Sociology, contemporary ideas about happiness have often been responses to a supposed 'decline in social virtues such as altruism and the growth in narcissism' (Cieslik 2014:15). Yet both Hyman's and Cieslik's interviewees appear to articulate fairly complex ideas about the general good which have a social dimension or sensitivity to the wellbeing of others. For scholars including Furedi, 'traditionally held virtues such as hard work, sacrifice...and commitment are frequently presented as antithetical to the quest of the individual for the feeling of happiness' (Cieslik 2014:15). Countering this, Cieslik (2014:8) shows that, 'the virtues of hard work and commitment and the satisfaction that comes from them' were all ones they cited and recognised 'in marked contrast to individuals seduced by a happiness rooted in immediate gratification'.

It is important however not to leap from a utilitarian happiness-maximising conception of individuals to a virtuous, self-sacrificing one. Qualitative approaches reveal 'a more integrative model of happiness...which includes both fleeting subjective dimensions of wellbeing (hedonia) and more enduring processes of flourishing (eudemonia)' (Cieslik 2014:2). Cieslik (2014:7-8) acknowledges that happiness was understood 'simplistically as subjective good feeling by my respondents'. At the same time, all interviewees, irrespective of their age, gender and class background 'cited numerous examples of how these moments were linked to 'working at something' or 'sacrifice' or a 'sense of achievement of overcoming'. These perspectives also represented a form of 'social happiness' (Thin 2012) by emphasising 'the continuing significance of wellbeing rooted in social, caring relationships and traditional virtues of compassion, altruism and duty' (Cieslik 2014:13).

But understanding happiness as a social process, how individual accounts have a social basis encompassing their social needs, does not mean collapsing the difference and depicting individuals

as mere emanations of social structures (Archer 2001) thereby reducing ‘the richness and complexity of individual experience...to mere illustrations of a dominant theoretical position’ (Robinson 2015:908). To counter an ‘impoverished and habit-bound (ibid)’ view of agency and rediscover the ‘living and breathing, embodied and feeling’ (Plummer 2001:5) human subject requires an appreciation that ‘things matter to people, and make a difference to how they are...their sense of well-being depends at least in part on how things that they care about – significant others, practices, political causes –are faring, and on how others are treating them’ (Sayer 2011:1). Their assessments about to what extent their lives are going well or badly are not simply products or abstractions of social position, nor are their judgements or justifications of their own and others’ behaviour solely based on rule-based moral conceptions grounded in strong social norms but develop in part ‘through practical action in the world’ (Archer 2001:50).

Happiness and Culture

Another Social Scientific contribution to Happiness Studies has come from anthropology (Walker & Kavedžija 2015; Mathews 2012; Thin 2012). Echoing mainstream sociology’s dismissive attitude, anthropology’s disciplinary aloofness towards Happiness Studies lies in its being perceived ‘as an essentially bourgeois preoccupation, increasingly associated with a neoliberal agenda, and potentially at odds with emancipatory politics’ (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:4). To this can be added ‘the normal social science bias towards pathologies’ (Thin 2014) and the ways anthropology (like sociology) ‘has often gravitated toward more “negative” forms of human experience, such as suffering, pain, or poverty’ (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:4).

Nonetheless, Walker & Kavedžija (2014:5) believe that ‘disengagement from one of the most important and high-profile recent developments in cross-disciplinary research and public debate would be a grave error’ and this is echoed by other anthropologists (Thin 2012;2014; Mathews 2012). Happiness ‘makes a claim about what is most desirable and worthwhile in a person’s life’ (Walker 2015:1) and universally ‘can function as a powerful motive’ (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:17) in the ways diversely situated persons orient and understand their lives. It therefore offers the anthropological endeavour the opportunity to better understand cultures and societies because ‘an adequate representation of society conveys some sense of how people experience life and find meaning in it’ (Thin 2012:325).

In turn, an anthropological lens offers happiness scholarship a window into ‘the social construction of happiness in cultural contexts’ (Thin 2012:313). Thin (2012) calls for the adoption of a positive and empathic “lens” in eliciting and analysing happiness narratives, respecting first-person subjectivity while also paying attention to the ways these conceptions of the good are culturally produced and

legitimated. Thin also calls for a holistic approach which situates happiness as part of a broader life course narrative and how it features as a key plot or driver in the attempt to establish meaning and purpose in a person's life.

Of further interest is how happiness accounts reveal cultural complexities in a global 'contemporary context of rapid individualization and changing social values' (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:10).

Mathews (2012:299) suggests that 'culture no longer refers simply to "the way of life of a people" but also to the array of choices individuals make from "the global cultural supermarket"'. Although the ways 'people living within a particular society are linguistically, culturally, socially and institutionally shaped to relate to the world' (Mathews 2012:304) still has an important bearing, 'we also increasingly live within a global cultural supermarket, where we pick and choose aspects of our cultural worlds' (Mathews 2012:304) within which a wide array of information and identities are available. Access to it is unevenly distributed, 'to a very rough extent, the wealthier a society is, and the more individuals within that society are educated and computer literate, the more the cultural supermarket may play a significant role in individuals' lives (Mathews 2012:305). Nonetheless, universally, 'the culture one lives in is no longer a reliable indicator' (Mathews 2012:305) of a whole variety of cultural preferences. Increasingly, culture as 'the way of life of a people' and culture as 'the information and identities available within the global cultural supermarket...co-exist within individual minds' (Mathews 2012:305).

In understanding the extent to which perceptions of happiness differ between nations as well as within them, anthropological criticisms of quantitative happiness studies are focused on how numerical self-reports obscure cultural contexts and therefore question the translatability of the SWB construct across different cultures where happiness may be both interpreted and valued differently (Mathews 2012). In addition, Walker & Kavedžija (2015) suggest that ethnographic enquiry to probe the relative salience and value of happiness in cross-cultural settings could consider a) the scope of happiness (is it available to everyone, an individualist property or something more collective), b) the relationship of happiness to ideas of virtue (of a worthwhile or 'good' life) and c) the question of responsibility (does happiness result from personal effort or is it something bestowed by others, or something co-produced- intersubjective and relational (Thin 2012)).

Global happiness studies do infer some cross-cultural differences, particularly a dichotomy between a individualist western concept and a more collectivist understanding in Asian cultures (Oishi et al 2013). However, Matthews is wary of these cultural generalisations, pointing out that 'In every society, there is both a particular, broad cultural context, and also substantial individual differences' (Mathews 2012:308). While an individual's perspective may emerge from deep, taken-for-granted

cultural influences, there exists a 'range of different individual comprehensions, motivations and lives lived within common cultural frameworks (Mathews 2012:308). Walker & Kavedžija (2015:10) too, caution against an over-simplifying 'collectivism/individualism dichotomy', pointing to empirical studies (Stafford 2015) that shows how East Asian conceptions of happiness viewed as 'the duty to care for the happiness of others...and may have little to do with individual achievement' (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:10) may be fragmenting, echoing Mathews (2012) concept of the "global cultural supermarket".

National Identity and Happiness

What might the themes explored above mean for identifying a British "sense" of happiness? This has to take into account the ways in which people's self-reports or descriptions of happiness (a raft of UK data has been supplied previously) are linked to an assessment of what happiness is held to be. Adopting Walker's & Kavedžija's (2015) categorical framing of scope, virtue and responsibility, then according to the conclusions of happiness surveys (UNSDN 2019; Oishi et al 2013), happiness in an affluent, westernised society like the UK is likely to be individual in scope, concerned with personal freedom and where happiness is a moral duty. Engelke's (2015) empirical study of the happiness of members of the British Humanist Association suggests that the scope of happiness is the autonomous subject (protected by a secular state), virtue consists of belief in rational enlightenment values and rejection of supernatural belief systems while responsibility for happiness is the individual's, temporally located in the here and now.

Baggini (2008) also emphasises the significance of freedom in an English version of happiness, but in ways more aligned with Capabilities Theory (explored previously) based on what individuals *could* choose rather than what they necessarily *do* choose. For most people in the UK, Baggini contends, happiness consists of a life of convenience and comfort over discovery and change, being contented with your current situation while also believing you are free to change it. Although this construct appears individualistic, Baggini's analysis roots contentment in parochial social networks of family and community; it is also socially-contingent: a range of material and status needs, particularly related to residence, income and employment, must be satisfied. After these have been secured, people are free to pursue their own private versions of the good life. This elision of privacy and freedom as a key motif of Englishness is supported by other ethnographic accounts (Miller 2015; Fox 2004) where the cultural stereotype/myth of English tolerance is depicted as basic indifference; others are free to live the lives they please providing it doesn't interfere too much with their own, a quintessentially liberal philosophical position (Mill 1989). From this standpoint, individuals are

responsible for their own happiness but also have a responsibility not to interfere with the happiness of their peers, and expect non-interference in return.

Affirming that national identities are in part about how we imagine or negotiate 'our collective relationship to the past' (Colls 2011:580), Colls (2011) and Tombs (2015) trace a historical continuity of belief in "English liberty" developed endogenously through national political institutions and exogenously to perceived foreign despotism. The significance of liberty is echoed by Easthope's (1999) analysis of an empiricist tradition in the history of English literature from the seventeenth century onwards consisting of a preference for the concrete over the abstract and the rational or 'common-sense' over dogma and centred on an autonomous moral subject.

This connection of empiricism and autonomy links to Engelke's (2015:71) British humanists with their dislike for fervour and faith and an emphasis of working things out for oneself. However, an empiricist outlook can also be portrayed more negatively as a failure of imagination: 'abstract and general principles have no attraction for Englishmen' (Hegel 1956:455 in Easthope 1999:61). Indeed, far from providing a clear-sighted and objective view of reality, this form of empiricism may constitute 'a blanketing English fog...a miasma of commonplace prejudice and taboos...visibility of any social and historical reality is always zero' (Anderson 1968:40 in Easthope 1999:63). In this version, "common-sense" is a shorthand for habit and the maintenance of the status quo (Skey 2013).

However, national identity 'is a slippery subject' (Colls 2011:574) and most scholars are wary of assigning essentialist and homogenised characteristics to it, referring 'to the persistent yet totally doomed attempt to capture some essential, eternal national characteristics' (Cohen 2000:578). Scornful of UK politicians who have attempted to articulate a list of "British" values, Cohen (2000:579) suggests 'such lists are sociologically illiterate in that they are clearly bound by the specificities of time, place, race, gender and education, among other variables'. However, these "myths" of national identity (Kearney 2003:4) 'may none the less have interesting sociological effects in that some social actors respond to myth- what is real in the mind can be real in its consequences' (Cohen 2000:579).

Cohen (2000:581) acknowledges that 'there are some powerful reasons why Britishness may have a claim on our identity', citing institutions like the monarchy and the BBC as conveying both territorial and symbolic aspects of national identity. Linked to this, Skey's (2011) empirical work on national identity in the UK stresses the psychological benefits of national belonging. Institutional arrangements and other 'spatial and temporal regularities contribute to a sense of continuity and regularity' (Skey 2013:85) and a combination of 'routine practices, institutional arrangements and

symbolic systems' can provide a 'relatively settled sense of identity, place and community' (Skey 2013:82). This not only contributes to "ontological security" (Giddens 1991), generating a sense of order, predictability and the confidence to solve practical problems, but at a social level makes 'our relations with other people more meaningful, manageable and secure' (Skey 2013:85).

The connection between national identity and happiness can be expressed either at an explicit/semantic level by individuals linking their wellbeing to membership of a nation or through self-identification with particular institutional arrangements, social practices and customs associated with a geographical or culturally bounded place. 'The importance of everyday features (language, practice, spatial and temporal regularities, material culture, institutional settings) in generating a more or less consistent sense of reality' (Skey 2011:94) situates the psychological benefits of national belonging as one that doesn't rely on an explicit or semantic self-identification. Everyday life, shared social practices and 'the routine activities of countless individuals and interactions reflect the idea that they live in and belong to nations' (Skey 2013:87).

However, shared forms of knowledge and values privilege certain groups more than others (Skey 2011). These groups may assert 'entitlement to judge who and what is appropriate within the bounded territory of the nation' (Skey 2013:94) and may 'take great comfort (consciously or not) from being positioned in this way ...both in terms of the status and material benefits they generate but also because they underpin a "common-sense" understanding of the way the world is, and should be' (Skey 2013:94). In this sense, shared outlooks and collective stocks of "common-sense" become ways of reinforcing 'hierarchies of belonging' (Hage 1998). Indeed, bondedness can be concretized as "us versus them", particularly where belonging claims involve ethnic majorities and migrant minorities (Somerville 2016).

Another problem of identifying a "British" conception of happiness is the way in which British and English identity are often conflated (to the irritation of the other home nations (Langlands 1999)). Despite Cohen's (2000) judgement that all writers of British/English identity tie themselves in knots trying to distinguish and differentiate the terms, others are more confident in their analytical parsing. Part of the confusion is that England is widely perceived to form the dominant core of "British", partly because 'Britain's key political structures- the crown, parliament and the unwritten constitution- are thoroughly English in character' (Langlands 1999:60). Another distinction made is that Englishness, (like Irish, Welsh and Scottish) refers more to an ethno-cultural core encompassing shared customs, language, culture whereas British is a multinational identity expressed at the formal institutional level e.g. politics, foreign affairs and citizenship. Cohen (2000) suggests that one way this plays out is how immigrants refer to themselves as British but rather less as English. "British" is a

formal category of citizenship enveloping multiple ethnicities and faiths and a more overarching affiliation to the state and its institutions.

Lastly, the extent to which individuals feel themselves to be attached or belong to a 'nation' also links to a point Mathews (2012:306) makes about the need to solicit views of how 'people view society in its happiness'. This relates to a previous point that "national happiness" is a normative concept that transcends the aggregate of individual satisfactions. How individuals 'talk about the nation' (Skey 2011) is likely to be partially framed by social position and personal self-interest but can also transcend these (Sayer 2011).

Lay Normativity

One interesting feature of the anthropological accounts (explored above) is how their cogent arguments for cultural diversity and complexity to be considered in happiness research also acknowledge something universal and pan-cultural about happiness. Despite differences in the translation or meaning of the word, happiness defined as how 'people search for the best way to live' (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:17) can be thought of less as a "thing" which can be precisely measured and more 'a rubric for the good life' (Thin 2014) or 'diagnostic of forms of life' (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:1), a means of understanding and evaluating the values, meanings and aims and concepts of a good life that 'diversely situated individuals "hold dear"' (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:1). 'Humans are uniquely and universally concerned' (Thin 2012:324) with happiness and although the meanings may differ 'people diversely situated in time and space grapple with fundamental questions about how to live, the ends of life, and what it means to be human' (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:1).

This cross-cultural depiction of happiness is one that emerges out of our shared humanity because 'there is a universal element to the individual pursuit of happiness because of our nature as human beings' (Mathews 2012:306). Underneath diverse cultural narratives, individuals have to 'cope with the unavoidable dilemmas posed by the impossible variety of human potentials and goals' (Thin 2012:321). Echoing earlier points about happiness as praxis- something grounded in the way individuals are required to act and make choices in respect of their own wellbeing and that of others, requiring 'a continuing exercise of moral judgement' (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:16), happiness research needs to 'direct attention to what actually matters to people...bringing the focus back to everyday moral practice and decision-making' (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:13 &17).

These ideas connect to sociological writings (Sayer 2011; Archer 2001; Cieslik 2017) that highlight the 'deeply evaluative character of human experience, and its relation to human vulnerability' (Sayer

2011:4). What Sayer (2011:1) terms “lay normativity” has ‘rational, referential aspects’, constituting an ongoing tacit analysis of objective properties in the social world in relation to whether they are conducive to flourishing and harm. People do this because ‘while we are capable and can flourish, we are also vulnerable and susceptible to various kinds of loss or harm...our vulnerability, related both to our needs and our awareness of lack, is highly social in emphasis, on relationships, work achievements or simply whether we think we are being fairly treated, and how we are treating others’ (Sayer 2011:1).

‘Continually monitoring or at least sensing their own and other people’s behaviours in a way as more or less good and bad’ (Sayer 2004:1), subjective evaluations represent a moral sensibility that we learn ‘through the informal education we get through social interactions’ (Archer 2001:18) in addition to what society prescribes. Moral judgement is an intrinsic part of being immersed, of ‘having to decide what to do, how to treat others, and how to make our way through and make sense of the world around us’ (Sayer 2011:5). Therefore, what Adam Smith (2013) termed ‘moral sentiments’ arise not from outward facts or dispassionate calculations but from our capacity to sympathise and to ‘understand the other’s situation by imagining ourselves in it through a mutual recognition of a shared predicament’ (Sayer 2004:8). Because humans, alone among mammals, emerge into the world in a form of ‘radical incompleteness’ (Nussbaum 1999), we are uniquely dependent on others to survive. A moral dimension is therefore ‘an unavoidable part of the nature of social relationships, involving a mutual sense of responsibilities and obligations and helps to explain our attachments in terms of loyalty and commitment to other people’ (Sayer 2004:16).

But although judgement ‘(can be) reasonable in relation to what it’s about’ (Sayer 2011:4), it can also be highly fallible, ‘mistaken or manipulated and can appear as mere reflexes of habituation’ (Sayer 2011:4), a theme underlined by psychological studies of rationality (Kahneman 2010). Our condition as ‘needy, vulnerable beings, suspended between things as they are and as they might become’ (Sayer 2011:4) underlines uncertainty about outcomes of choices and incomplete perceptual capacities- full knowledgeability on the part of agents’ (Archer 2001:21) is not possible. Praxis assumes that ‘when we think about how to act, we do so with some awareness of the implications for well-being – both ours and that of others’ (Smith 2011), however, competing interests, deeply embedded emotional reflexes or the lure of immediate gratification all hinder this capacity. Equally, ‘we may be satisfied with what is tolerable for our own group, rather than what is beneficial for all, and indeed may promote practices and institutions which allow us to flourish at the expense of others’ (Sayer 2004:15). People’s justifications of their own behaviour can ‘defend conventions, while taking things at face value obscures the structural and unconscious forces operating through a particular situation’ (Sayer 2004:15).

There may also be the danger of over-privileging an agency 'held to account for the entirety of the social context by a process of aggregation...as master in abstraction from the social circumstances that influence who they are and how they think and act' (Archer 2001:22). However, on balance, 'reflexivity is needed not just to examine how justifications of practices are influenced by social position and wider discourses but also, in the opposite direction, to examine what they do not explain' (Sayer 2011:3). Sayer (2011:3) calls for more qualitative research in order to gain 'a more rounded understanding of people's concerns regarding their capacity to flourish or suffer, the quality of their social relations, their material circumstances, and the subsequent evaluation of these'.

Towards a Social Scientific contribution

Social scientists can be wary of normative dimensions to happiness. Understandably, it is feared that 'researchers would impose their own value-judgements or 'conceptions of the good' on those they study' (Sayer 2011:45). Yet this is somewhat of a paradox: a reluctance to get into discussions about happiness in a generalizable sense derives from a wish to protect people, in effect conceding the concept. 'A fear that being so discursively constituted, people will suffer' (Thin 2014:1) is often a praiseworthy 'attempt to protect non-western people from soft colonialism in the form of ideas and standards'. Promoting happiness could harm people (Ahmed 2010), because 'notions of happy lives function as powerful moral signifiers of right or wrong ways of living...framing practices that marginalise minorities' (Cieslik 2014:11). Again, the power of this argument relates to its implicit appeal to safeguard the wellbeing of those excluded or subjugated by these notions.

Social scientists have also been suspicious of happiness studies because it appears to distract 'from more significant underlying processes that shape our lives' (Cieslik 2014:2), particularly social injustice and inequalities. However, since descriptions and analyses of happiness are always socially embedded, insight can be gained into how social structures impinge on this struggle but also why and in what ways this matters to people. Equally, as indicated by empirical studies (ONS 2011; Dolan 2011), subjective perspectives about greater happiness and wellbeing across society seem to largely echo progressive social agendas around equality and the protection of public goods (Compass 2006).

Thin argues that 'the default way of being progressive as a sociologist is to highlight suffering and social harms with a view to alleviating them' (Thin 2014:20). But a reluctance to focus on the good in people's lives 'obstructs the very core sociological enterprise in isolating and promoting public and social goods' (Thin 2014:20). Thin (2014:8) proposes a happiness lens to include 'appreciative empathy towards first-person accounts (and) a way of making sociology more transparent regarding its contributions to understanding and promoting good societies and good lives'. A lifespan and narrative dimension (Bauer et al 2008) is also recommended, 'in terms of the temporal frames used

to make an assessment or think about the terms' (Thin 2012:322). A happiness lens would provide insights into 'the way individuals perceive and negotiate their sense of self with social properties -- whether a discrete individual is the main or only consideration, or do some people evaluate their own life satisfaction as part of a wider collective' (Thin 2012:312).

Chapter Three: Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach to explore how people across the UK experience and perceive happiness and wellbeing in their lives and society. Secondary analysis of 200 open-archive documents generated by a Mass Observation Project (MOP 2013) directive from a participant panel comprising residents from different ages, occupations, sex and places across the UK, will enable me to answer four key research questions:

- 1) How do happiness accounts align with contemporary and classical depictions of happiness as eudemonia or flourishing?
- 2) Using happiness as a 'conceptual lens' (Thin 2012), what does a focus on the experience and perceptions of degrees of happiness tell us about what matters most to people across life as a whole?
- 3) How do social factors (e.g. age, class) mediate individual experiences and perceptions of happiness and wellbeing?
- 4) How do people perceive happiness in their society?

This research is a response to what Bryman (2008:8) describes as a situation 'where a researcher may feel that existing approaches being used for research on a topic are deficient'. In the field of happiness studies, an over-reliance on quantitative methods is obscuring a fuller understanding of 'this meaningful entity in people's lives' (Hyman 2014:23). In adopting a qualitative methodology, this research provides an alternative approach that is appropriate because of the need to generate knowledge about how individuals interpret questions about their happiness and the meanings behind their responses.

The research questions were designed to explore the different forms happiness may assume. They explore whether happiness is the phenomenon that the majority of contemporary happiness research claims it to be, that is, a subjective description of the size of a heap of satisfactions at a particular point of time that can be captured and isolated as a scientific, numerical construct (Thin 2012). At a societal level, they seek to explore the concept of national or general wellbeing beyond a simplifying reductionism of aggregating and averaging individual self-reports.

This research builds on an emerging body of qualitative data generated by members of the British Sociological Association's Happiness Studies group, particularly Cieslik (2017) and Hyman (2014), that reveal much more complex accounts of what happiness means to people, including data that suggests that 'respondents often understood and experienced happiness in ways similar to classical

writings on flourishing or eudemonia' (Cieslik 2014:5). If happiness studies is ignoring these more normative, processual and critical dimensions to subjective happiness that emerge through qualitative enquiry, then a fuller understanding of the nature of happiness, how it is both experienced and evaluated, is unlikely to develop.

This research therefore adopts an interpretivist epistemology, seeking knowledge about how individuals interpret questions about their happiness and the meanings behind their responses. A key tenet of an interpretive approach is that 'people are distinct from the objects studied in the natural sciences, requiring researchers to understand the subjective meaning of social action' (Bryman 2008:399), the key difference being that objects of analysis in the natural sciences, unlike people, cannot attribute meaning to events and their environment. A central problem of the positivist epistemology employed by the majority of happiness surveys is that, in separating people's descriptive and analytical selves and foreclosing the possibility of people expanding on or explaining their given self-reports, researchers fail to gain any insight into these subjective meanings or the ways in which respondents interpret and approach the questions (Thin 2012; Mathews 2012). It also represents something of a paradox: happiness scholarship is driven by empathic and humanistic impulses to help people lead happier lives yet shows little interest in the content of their happiness. As Thin puts it, 'the happiness quantifier is interested in whether your glass is half-full but refuses to listen to your stories about what's in the glass and how it got there' (Thin 2012:326).

Instead, quantitative surveys attempt to provide insights into subjective happiness by emphasising the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables (Denzin & Lincoln 2004:8), often by applying regression analysis to a range of individual and objective characteristics to isolate the independent variables of a high or low happiness score. Although a core purpose of social scientific empirical research is determining the causal factors of social phenomena, a methodology of identifying positive correlations and causations between different variables is problematic given the complex nature of the subject matter; it is doubtful whether happiness is a phenomenon that can be explained by the regularity theory of causation 'consisting simply of regular associations between events or variables' (May 2008: 9). Unlike objects in nature, 'humans are self-aware beings who confer sense and purposes on what they do' (Giddens 1997:12-13 in May 2008:8). Therefore, a key critique of positivism is based on rejecting the applications of the canons of the natural sciences to the study of human relations, emphasising that researchers will fail to portray social life with any degree of authenticity unless they first 'grasp the concepts that people apply in their descriptions and evaluations' (May 2008:8).

These concepts, and how they are interpreted and understood by respondents, are crucial in gaining a richer understanding of subjective descriptions of happiness and wellbeing. Furthermore, quantitative happiness epistemologies place faith in the infallibility of subjects providing numerical representations of their lives, as if happiness, like names, 'come ready made' (Thin 2012:315), to the exclusion of any insights as to how these numbers came to be produced and what they mean. This approach tends to contradict the professed principles driving these research studies, denying subjects the opportunity to interpret and analyse their own happiness and wellbeing whilst simultaneously stressing the significance of subjectivity and the ways people evaluate their lives (Diener 2008). It is also self-defeating: happiness researchers (Layard et al 2016; Pavot & Diener 2013; Dolan 2011) often state they want to use the data to impress upon policy makers the importance of taking people's happiness and wellbeing seriously, yet generate de-contextualised and dis-embedded happiness data that provide no insights about why and in what ways happiness and wellbeing matters to ordinary people at all. The track-record of the Mass Observation Project to elicit rich, interpretive data about a range of issues (Savage 2007) therefore seems particularly well-suited to provide insights into the ways individuals reflect on the subject of happiness.

In quantitative research, individual self-reports can appear to have no reason or reasoning behind them. But descriptions of happiness are about something, particularly the way individuals think and feel about their lives (Hyman 2014; Oman 2014; Cieslik 2014). Quantitative researchers acknowledge this connection but are essentially incurious about what subjects have to say about it. They also acknowledge how life satisfaction evaluations are about something important, directly linked to concrete, objective spheres of existence and representing something about what people value. However, 'in neglecting to gain access to the inside experience...the inner reality of humans' (Bryman 2008:367), quantitative researchers substitute these subjective, evaluative interpretations with their own judgements, leading to unwarranted and in some cases fairly 'heroic' claims (Thin 2012). In this way, happiness data is decoupled from the things people care about and value. As will be explored in the empirical data chapters, these include what they consider good and bad about their experiences and why, how well they are doing across a variety of domains, if their needs are being satisfied, whether their activities are meaningful, how they are treating and relating to others and how others are treating and relating to them.

Part of the problem may lie in the separation within quantitative approaches of people's experiencing and analysing selves, and subsequently the separation of people's descriptions of social phenomena from the ways they think and feel about them. Sayer's (2004) contention is that much contemporary social scientific research, by splitting people's experiencing and analytical selves, has failed to take seriously what people care about, and why things matter to them, reducing the role of

agency in social ontology as being either dictated by class or status position in the field, or through internalising discourse, or as a purely subjective matter. Sayer calls for a conception of agency to accommodate the ongoing evaluative practices people are engaged in, including reflexive monitoring of their wellbeing, 'as sentient beings whose relationship to the world is one of concern' (Sayer 2011:1). Bryman (2008:14) states that there are key ideas that drive the research process and shed light on the interpretation of the resulting findings and I believe Sayer's (2004) concept of 'lay normativity' offers an important sociological contribution to happiness research by emphasising the moral dimension to subjective experience of the social world.

An interpretive approach enabled me to explore lay normativity, by analysing data where respondents link their experiences and perceptions of happiness with what they value and consider important in their lives. In relation to my first research question, understanding how individuals both describe their experience of happiness and analyse this experience in normative terms allowed me to link lay perceptions to theoretical traditions about the nature of happiness, both at the explicit and latent level (Braun & Clarke 2006). Examining the extent to which these perceptions align with classical and contemporary ideas of happiness as eudemonia and flourishing builds on data (Cieslik 2017; Jones 2015; ONS 2011; Dolan 2011) that signifies a shift towards an understanding of happiness more closely aligned with this theoretical tradition. As will be explored in Chapter Four, the attitudes of respondents also aligned with other "classical" traditions including Stoic and Epicurean theories about the nature of happiness but also may link to a "British" empiricist tradition (Colls 2011).

Another justification of adopting an interpretive strategy concerns the way happiness is being conceptualised as well as measured in quantitative surveys. Shedding no light on the reasoning behind people's self-reports, they fail to capture what individuals think about happiness in terms of 'the pursuit of happiness' in relation to goals, purpose and meaning-in-life. Currently, theoretical assumptions driving most happiness studies equate happiness with utility, conceptualised as a heap of satisfactions, 'depressed through pain and elevated by pleasure' (Thin 2012:316), that individuals seek to maximise. As epistemological approaches are directly related to operationalising ontological assumptions (Mason 2002), happiness, in these studies, has been reified as a subjective, internal state phenomenon that exists as a higher or lower quantity of positive emotions and satisfactions because, in utilitarian theory, 'life is good if the size is high' (Thin 2012:316). But because recent qualitative studies have shown that there may be things that people want more, and which motivate them, over and above how happy it will make them feel, then the construct validity of current methodologies may be called into question. This is because splitting off people's descriptions from their analyses may mean neglecting an important normative dimension. For example, as explored in

Chapter Four, how someone defines happiness mediates how happy they “are”, and a stoic interpretation of happiness problematises the idea of happiness as a “size” that can be measured at a particular point in time. In addition, as explored in the Literature Review, the Anthropological contribution to happiness studies (Thin 2012; Walker & Kavedžija 2015; Matthews 2012), emphasising the ethnographic and cultural context of happiness accounts, will enable me to observe any discernible patterns from how a “British” research cohort, both in style and content, engages with happiness.

Thin (2012:316) recommends researchers consider happiness as a ‘conceptual lens’ through which experiences and perceptions of happiness are understood in the context of an individual’s life as-a-whole. The ‘happiness lens’ is, firstly, a way for researchers to understand key motivations, meanings and themes in people’s lives through individuals talking about their happiness and unhappiness. This, Thin believes, adds an important empathic dimension to happiness scholarship in addition to providing a more rounded understanding of subjective happiness and wellbeing. Secondly, in conceptualising happiness as a grounded, processual phenomenon, the happiness lens can be understood as a concept used in everyday practice to evaluate what is more or less good or bad about what is happening⁴, a kind of diagnostic tool (Walker & Kavedžija 2015). In this sense, happiness becomes something individuals live with and use rather than something they aim for.

Savage (2007) has noted how many Mass observers adopt a reflexive, autobiographical style whereby topics are situated within a broader life narrative. Therefore, in relation to my second research question, this autobiographical aspect allowed an exploration of happiness not only in terms of what activities and engagements have greater salience in happiness terms but also as a processual phenomenon across the lifespan related to key moments, choices, successes, turning points, ambitions and positive and negative experiences. This tendency was assisted in the way the questions of the Mass Observation Directive shifted the temporal orientation (Walker & Kavedžija 2015) from present circumstances to a future and past perspective. In a lifespan focus, the highs or lows of happiness emerge as part of an overall structure, woven ‘into a complex master plot’ (Thin 2012:326). From this diachronic perspective, the know-ability of the nature of happiness becomes more problematic, particularly as it relates to understanding experiences of unhappiness as well as joy. For example, a broader temporal perspective may mean that episodes of high happiness are not automatically narrated as positive in so far as they contribute to a person’s overall development or journey; equally, difficult episodes may be seen as positive turning points, something emphasised in

⁴ In everyday discourse this can be illustrated by the things people say they are happy *with* or *about*. This is reflected in the language MOP respondents used, for example their happiness “with” or “about” wider society.

the psychological literature on happiness (Haidt 2006) that also emerged through the Mass Observation accounts either as ‘silver linings’ (Cieslik 2017) or through recovery from experiences such as ill health. This potentially transforms the nature of happiness from a countable thing that exists as a bigger or smaller size at a particular moment to a much more processual phenomenon, understood not in particular moments but as something emerging over time and reflected upon in terms of the overall journey.

My third question addresses the relationship between objective factors and individual happiness. This is in part a more traditional social scientific enquiry ‘to elicit and analyse first-hand accounts to explore causal theories of the interaction between happiness and other factors’ (Thin 2012:326) and in methodological terms to provide more depth and insight into the headline data sets of quantitative happiness surveys. For example, one positivist claim of happiness studies – 65 to 74 year olds are the happiest age group (ONS 2018) - is generated out of patterns of associations identified by quantitative data. Biographical data enabled me to explore not only how high and low wellbeing are linked to one’s age but also the way age shapes and shifts perceptions of the nature of happiness. In addition, particularly in areas where the respondent panel is over-represented (explored in detail below), how age, class and ethnicity influence and shape subjective experience, or are themselves used as objects of reference by respondents, can be explored⁵.

Interpretive and biographical accounts are embedded in their wider cultural and socio-spatial contexts (Mason 2002; Mathews 2012; Walker & Kavedžija 2015), and so are likely to provide researchers with both explicit and implicit commentary on wider social themes and conditions. This is significant because, as explored in the literature review, a lot of effort has been made to try and identify through large-scale happiness surveys not only which countries can be said to be happier than others but also the kind of social, political and environmental conditions conducive to general wellbeing. Interpretive data about happiness can shed light on some of the causal theories espoused by happiness researchers about how, for example, access to resources act as enablers or constraints (and in what ways) in the pursuit of happiness and the ability to flourish.

Yet while some interpretive studies (Hyman 2014; Cieslik 2014) have sought to understand these societal factors, no research has explicitly explored how individuals perceive levels of happiness and wellbeing in their society as a whole and the ways in which this links to individual happiness. My fourth research question, in exploring how individuals locate their experiences and perceptions of happiness in relation to societal factors, provided insights into how individuals appraise levels of

⁵ other individual characteristics that respondents (mostly) provide are marital status, occupation and place of residence

happiness and wellbeing in the UK and the kinds of social conditions they perceive as being conducive to greater societal happiness and wellbeing, in addition to their own. This was an aspect of enquiry which yielded particularly rich data from the Mass Observation Directive and underlines that one of the missed opportunities of the UK national wellbeing index has been to neglect this social dimension of individual attitudes to happiness, raising questions about the validity of operationalising a concept of national happiness through simply aggregating individual self-reports.

This missing social dimension relates partly to the ways in which wider conditions are perceived to directly impact on a person's levels of happiness and wellbeing, but extends to what individuals are happy or unhappy about in their society, social concerns that include a sensitivity to the wellbeing and treatment of others that may override self-interest, powerful discourses or an individual's social position (Sayer 2004). That being said, it would be naïve to posit that individuals stand aside from their socio-cultural contexts, and part of examining how British people talk about happiness is to gain insight of how happiness may be culturally produced, or how, following Skey (2011), themes of national identity are significant in understanding personal accounts, at either a latent or semantic level.

As previously identified, empirical research, including the ONS' (2011) own findings into its national wellbeing measurement consultation, has provided glimpses of lay perspectives on national wellbeing linked to concepts about the greater good. These surveys also suggest that people are able to make a distinction between what is good for their individual wellbeing and what is good for society as a whole when asked about national wellbeing measures. Therefore, a lack of interpretive data about perceptions of and prescriptions for national wellbeing means that we may fail to provide a richer and more complex understanding of people's concerns. This is both an epistemological and ontological problem. The lack of "social aspiration" data illustrates the problem of measuring 'national' or 'social' wellbeing without an accompanying debate about what it is for, how the data will be used or what a good or happier society might look like. As will be seen in the empirical chapters, particularly Chapter Eight, the concept of national wellbeing is not a neutral, descriptive phenomenon (Walker & Kavedžija 2015) but one grounded in ideological self-placement (Norris & Inglehart 2016) and appraisals of policies and practices deemed to either create or constrain personal and general wellbeing.

The value of adopting an interpretive epistemology for this research project is both the attempt to make sense of the world from the social actor's viewpoint but also to gain an empathic understanding of human action (Jones 2003). While an interpretive methodology exhibits a concern with subjectivity, a humanistic sensitivity implies an empathic concern with the human subjects

themselves. In emphasising this concern, I make no claims of primacy for the agent in creating and determining the social world; agency is circumscribed by social structure, often in ways agents embedded in culture are not aware of (Matthews 2012). However, they are aware, particularly, in Sayer's (2011:1) phrasing, 'of the capacity to flourish and suffer'. Happiness research that fails to show how and why people care about their wellbeing and that of others is going to find it difficult to engage its audience as to why this research should matter. Thin (2012) notes the irony of research that seems to be driven by humanistic impulses to make a positive difference to people's lives producing the least empathic data imaginable.

In relation to human subjects, quantitative happiness research not only lacks empathy but is also reductive in its conceptualisation of self-interested and rational agents. But equally reductive are other social scientific approaches (e.g. Ahmed 2010; Furedi 2004) that conceptualise individual preference as being dictated either by societal position or through internalizing norms, framing individual narratives as discursive reproductions or as reflexive strategies based on their status position in the social field (Sayer 2011; Archer 2001).

Insofar as individual interpretations are in part relational products of their particular social realities and discourses, an individual's ideas are indeed shaped by their particular circumstances and conditions. However, the tendency to see ordinary people's beliefs as rationalisations of their social position 'ignores normative rationales that matter greatly to actors. These rationales concern what is of value, how to live, what is worth striving for and what is not' (Sayer 2004:4). In addition, from my own professional experience of exploring historical ideas about happiness with students with no prior knowledge of these historical and philosophical texts, discursive and status-framed notions of human agency do not seem to adequately explain the durability and resonance of ideas about happiness from a myriad of (predominantly but not invariably Western) cultures that stretch back over 2,500 years. Indeed, the opinions expressed by MOP respondents, both at a semantic and latent level, can be aligned with a range of these theories.

I accept that subjective accounts, interpretations and judgements, may be fallible, biased and performative. This is something I explore in more depth when reflecting on the pros and cons of document analysis. Neither may individuals necessarily be aware, despite their assertions, of all the generative mechanisms or underlying processes that govern their behaviour and ideas. That said, I do think any understanding of social ontology ought to include an appreciation of how the nature of lay normativity entails a reflexive, evaluating agent grappling with ideas about the good life through everyday questions, situations and concerns. And while identities are formed through social practices, equally, personal identity and social practices are something people are engaged in

evaluating, thinking about and grappling with (Sayer 2011; Archer 2001). One of the most striking features of the accounts is the critical stance adopted towards the way happiness is culturally promoted and defined.

But while I see people's interpretations as an integral part of understanding the phenomena of happiness, I do not wish to invalidate the value of quantitative approaches. The strength of quantitative approaches is that they can reveal broad patterns and snapshots of social phenomena. Even critics of quantitative approaches concede that, in the sense of providing broad patterns and snapshots, these approaches can be useful, providing a good starting point from which to explore the headlines they reveal (Mathews 2012; Thin 2012). The point is not to abandon quantitative methods but to challenge their supremacy within happiness research, to re-balance the weight of influence afforded to them. Happiness research needs less width and more depth, for, as Thin (2012:314) notes, 'we are counters and recounters' but 'counting-mode' research into happiness has been promoted to the exclusion of interpretive insight. As he puts it, 'solely numerical depictions of happiness are as inadequate as purely numerical ratings would be as a form of commentary on the arts' (Thin 2012:320).

Therefore, a key advantage of a qualitative approach is that it offers thick descriptions, rich accounts of a phenomenon to provide a depth of understanding rather than the breadth that is characteristic of quantitative research. Quantitative methods also attempt to capture the individual's point of view but 'only skim the surface of a person's perspective' (Bernard 2000:31). Qualitative research thinks it can get closer (Denzin & Lincoln 2004:9&10), enabling subjects to make explicit some of the key themes and causal connections behind their understanding of the social world, or for themes to emerge implicitly in the stories people tell, enabling researchers to build a more nuanced understanding of the research topic.

However, adopting a qualitative research methodology has its drawbacks. One of these is the difficulty of making generalisations from small samples, especially when, as is the case of the Mass Observation Panel, the sample isn't representative of the wider population demographic (May 2008; Denzin & Lincoln 2004). One epistemological issue is whether the depth provided by qualitative research can only 'give a rich account of a phenomenon in a particular place or time' or whether these thick descriptions can 'provide others with a database for making judgements about the possible transferability of findings to other milieu' (Bryman 2008:392). One stance is that qualitative research need not attempt to imitate the 'scientific' validity of quant research – objectivity, internal & external validity and reliability- and instead adopt a methodology concerned with trustworthiness and plausibility, recognising that though 'every instance of a case or process bears the stamp of a

general class of phenomena it belongs to...any given instance is likely to be particular and unique' (Lincoln & Guba 1994 in Denzin & Lincoln 2004:xiv) in relation to time and place. As I shall seek to show, a further advantage of the qualitative approach is in identifying the 'telling' as opposed to the 'typical' case (Pollen 2013).

One key benefit of interpretive data is the degree of poignancy (Morris 2015) it can add to understanding the social world. This can relate to the ways in which individuals make connections and ground abstract issues in everyday life and its cares and concerns, providing an emotional depth to the subject which can resonate with the audience. In capturing this emotional dimension to subjective experience, qualitative data is characteristically fluid and messy (Mason 2002:16) but then it is likely that an understanding of what kind of phenomena happiness is will be one that acknowledges this messiness in the way individuals relate to and think about the term.

Data Collection

This interpretive strategy was operationalised through secondary analysis of an existing data set, analysing 200 reflective happiness accounts generated by the Mass Observation Project in 2013. Unlike primary analysis where, in the case of interviews, researchers collect, analyse and write up the data within the same project, secondary analysis is 'an empirical exercise carried out on data that has already been gathered or compiled in some way' (Dale et al 1988:3-4). Like other notable social surveys (examples include Understanding Society, formerly the British Household Panel Survey, and the British Social Attitudes Survey), the Mass Observation Archive constitutes a long-standing 'publicly available data set which others can utilise' (Dale et al 1988:7).

Originally, I had planned to use two data sources, complementing the secondary analysis of documents with semi-structured interviews. This had less to do with any potential epistemological benefits of triangulating data than a perceived drawback in the MOP methodology in relation to my research frame: a lack of questions explicitly asking respondents to generate perceptions about social happiness and wellbeing. This social dimension, to my mind, required elicitation, both in terms of it being an important aspect of experiences and perceptions of happiness and as a significant and epistemologically problematic absence within existing national wellbeing measures. However, upon reading through the documents, much unsolicited social commentary was made by the panel, predominantly, and very revealingly, in the section where they were asked to explore things *which made them unhappy*. Due to the rich, unprompted social commentary generated by the MOP respondents I felt interviews were no longer required to draw out these social perceptions.

The data set comprises 200 accounts about happiness written by the volunteer participant panel of the Mass Observation Project, responding to a 2013 seasonal directive, 'What Is Happiness?'. Originally established in 1937, Mass Observation (relaunched as the Mass Observation Project in 1981) aims to provide a record of everyday life by eliciting written accounts about a diverse range of topics from ordinary people in order to gain access to the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of non-official voices in the UK. Seasonal directives constitute a set of open questions that invite participants 'to write freely and discursively about their views and experiences on a range of subjects' (Casey et al 2014).

The 2013 happiness directive was sent to 592 panel members. The directive asked the panel to respond to 6 questions about happiness:

1. *What makes you happy and what does happiness mean to you?*
2. *Write down 10 things (or as many as you can think of) that make you happy. Be as descriptive or imaginative in your answers as you wish*
3. *People sometimes talk about 'the happiest day' of their lives. Do you have a day/time like this? Please give details*
4. *If you could relive a moment in your life again, when would this be and why?*
5. *Maybe you feel your happiest day is yet to come, how do you imagine it?*
6. *Is there anything that makes you unhappy?*

The Mass Observation archive is one of 'the major repositories of longitudinal qualitative social data for the UK' (Casey et al 2014) and has been described by Savage (2007:57) as 'the most studied, and arguably the most important, social research institution of the mid-twentieth century'. Criticized for appearing, in practice, to solicit accounts from a narrow, predominantly female, older and 'middle class' segment of the population, since 2000 the MOP has revised its recruitment procedures 'so that its composition gradually becomes more representative of the population as a whole' (Casey et al 2014). Although the same criticism about a lack of representativeness is still made, research has shown 'that the panel is not particularly unrepresentative of national patterns' (Pollen 2013:221).

While this may be the case for the panel as a whole, statistical breakdown of the respondents to the Happiness Directive (200 of a total panel of 592) emphasises the greater proportion of older and female participants. In Table A I present the breakdown related to age, sex and location and in percentages compared to the UK population as a whole.

Table A. **Winter 2013 Directive: Breakdown of MOP respondents' Sex, Age and Location compared with UK population⁶**

Mail out date: 26th November 2013 (stats collected on 14th February 2014)

Respondent Panel Size: 200

A1. Breakdown of MO respondent panel by sex and comparison to UK population

	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondent Panel	UK Population
Male	69	35%	49%
Female	131	65%	51%

A2. Breakdown of MO respondent panel by age and comparison to UK population

	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondent Panel	UK adult population (16+)
16-26	11	5.5%	18%
27-40	36	18%	23%
41-50	39	19.5%	18%
51-60	23	11.5%	15%
61-70	38	19%	13%
71 Plus	50	25%	13%
No age Information	3	1.5%	N/A

⁶ All 2011 UK Census Data retrieved from <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/population-and-household-estimates-for-the-united-kingdom/stb-2011-census--population-estimates-for-the-united-kingdom.html> Date accessed 28th March 2016

A3. Breakdown of MO respondent panel by location and comparison to UK population

	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondent Panel	UK Population
South East	44	22%	13.5%
North West	19	9.5%	11%
West Midlands	23	11.5%	9%
Yorkshire and the Humber	19	9.5%	8%
East Midlands	18	9%	7%
Scotland	11	5.5%	8.5%
London	11	5.5%	13%
East	16	8%	9%
South West	16	8%	8.5%
North East	12	6%	4%
Wales	7	3.5%	5%
N Ireland	2	1%	3%
Abroad	2	1%	N/A

The data presented in Table A underlines the point made by other users of the Mass Observation Archive (Lindsay & Bulloch 2013; Savage 2007) about the older demographic of MOP respondents. The 71+ age group are over-represented in the MOP respondent panel, at 25%, compared to 13% in equivalent age groups in the UK as a whole. Conversely, the youngest age group, 16-26 year olds, are under-represented in the MOP respondent panel, at just 6%, compared to 18% of the equivalent UK cohort. Other age groups are more representative of the national picture.

In terms of respondent breakdown across UK regions, London is the anomaly in being clearly under-represented in the MOP respondent panel, comprising 6% of the MOP panel compared to 13% in the

UK as a whole. Further analysis of the location of respondents revealed that only a quarter lived in cities within these regions, set against the national picture whereby cities comprise over half the total population (Government Office for Science 2014). The South-East of England is the only UK region where the MOP cohort are noticeably over-represented. The other point to make about the regional breakdown of the respondent panel is its under-representation of those living in three of the home nations of the UK, Scotland, Wales and particularly Northern Ireland.

Based on information about occupation (which most respondents supplied), further analysis explored the social class of the respondents. This was achieved using the National Statistics of Socio-Economic Classification model (NS-SEC), an ‘occupationally based class schema’ (Savage 2013:221) and one used by the UK and many other nations in official class statistics (Savage 2014). In this model, an individual’s employment position is allocated to one of seven classes that ‘principally distinguishes between people working in routine or semi-routine occupations employed on a “labour contract” on the one hand, and those working in professional or managerial occupations employed on a “service contract” on the other’ (Savage 2013:221). Table C below shows comparative percentages of the UK population based on the most recent NS-SEC statistics (ONS 2019) and the MOP respondents who occupy these socio-economic classes based on their occupation.

Table B. Percentages of UK population and MOP panel occupying the seven classes of the NS-SEC⁷

Values	Categories	UK population 2019	MOP Respondents ⁸
1	Higher managerial and professional	12.2 %	12.5%
2	Lower Managerial and Professional	21%	34.5%
3	Intermediate Occupations	10.5%	18.5%
4	Small employers & own account workers	8.3%	1.5%
5	Lower Supervisory and Technical	5.5%	3.5%

⁷ Statistics from ONS Quarterly Labour Force Survey, July - September, 2019

⁸ Although around a third of respondents are retired, the vast majority of these provided information about their principal occupation. Likewise, following coding guidance provided by the ONS (2010), I have also included the previous occupations of respondents who are not currently in employment because of disability or sickness.

6	Semi-Routine	10%	5.5%
7	Routine Occupations	7.3%	2%
8	Full-time students, unemployed, never worked and other not classified	25%	22%

Adopting Savage's (2013) contention that the "Middle class" are traditionally aligned with Occupational Category 1, 2 and (more ambiguously⁹) 3, as can clearly be seen, the panel is particularly middle-class in nature, with almost two thirds occupying the top three occupational classes, compared to just under half of the UK population according to the NS-SEC. This data underlines claims made concerning the predominantly Middle-Class characteristic of the panel (Lindsay & Bulloch 2013). Working-class occupations are particularly under-represented amongst MOP respondents. Again, adopting Savage's (2013) mapping of "working-class" onto categories 6 and 7 of the occupational class schema, under 10% of the MOP respondents are in working-class occupations compared to almost 20% of the UK population as a whole.

In recent decades, the NS-SEC occupational schema has been criticized for over-simplifying social class, as 'a focus on occupations as the sole measure of class occludes the more complex ways that class operates symbolically and culturally...such an appreciation requires a more culturally sensitive mode of analysis' (Savage 2013:222). In particular, the work of Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) has been instrumental in broadening understanding of how class is perpetuated by focusing on social and cultural as well as economic and occupational factors, and the interplay between them. This more elaborate concept of class entails an understanding of how social capital (one's social contacts and networks) and cultural capital (how individuals value and engage with cultural goods) serve to perpetuate class inequalities.

Accordingly, in 2013, a new model of Social Class was developed by a team of academics led by Mike Savage in partnership with the BBC that measures an individual's economic, social and cultural capital and was operationalised in the 2013 Great British Class Survey (GBCS). Unlike the NS-SEC, I was unable to map the respondents directly onto this 7-item Social Class schema. However, I was able to use themes emerging from the accounts about social networks and cultural engagements to generate a more nuanced class portrait of the MOP panel. Occupationally and educationally, the cohort align with Category 2 of the GBCS scale: the "professional middle class", particularly as Savage (2013:234) identifies this group as having 'modestly high profiles for professionals working in

⁹ which Savage (2015) describes as being aligned with the lower middle-class

public service' and having often gone to university. Almost half of the MOP panel are or were pre-retirement working in Public Sector occupations, many of which require degrees at entry-level. In addition, as will be seen in Chapter Five, Higher Education experience is also referenced by respondents as a happiness factor.

However, the "professional middle class" of the GBCS are also characterised by high levels of social and cultural capital, and this is not reflected by the respondent cohort. In general, social networks do not appear to be particularly extensive, although this is probably in part due to the older age of the cohort and the 'natural attrition' (Miller 2015:15) in social engagement that accompanies ageing. Furthermore, in exploring the new landscape of class, Savage (2015) makes the distinction between 'highbrow/traditional' cultural capital and an emerging cultural capital which moves effortlessly but with a discerning knowingness between different forms of mass-produced and popular, globalised cultures. In this contemporary landscape, the professional middle-classes are becoming more 'culturally omnivorous' (Savage 2015). Again, evidence of engagement in this 'emerging social capital' was slim amongst the middle-class MOP respondents. For example, very few wrote about engaging with digital cultural products (and when they did, this was often expressed negatively).

Therefore, the Mass Observation panel are perhaps a little more elusive and diffuse in class terms than at first glance. Despite being aligned occupationally with the "Middle-Class" category of the NS-SEC, they don't map onto Savage's "professional middle class" because they are not socially gregarious or culturally omnivorous in engaging with both highbrow and popular culture. Neither do they fit the GBCS's item 3 of the 7-class schema, the "technical middle class", characterised by relative affluence but low levels of social and cultural capital, because, unlike this class category, a higher proportion have public-sector occupations and are university-educated.

Ethnicity data is not available to researchers of the Mass Observation panel, but on reading all of the accounts in the Happiness Directive, it would be surprising if these respondents came anywhere close to representative levels of BAME individuals living in the UK (13% according to the gov.uk website). This is for two reasons: firstly, all the accounts in terms of language and phrasing appear to be written by native English speakers; second, and perhaps more pertinent, there are no references that would indicate a mixed or other cultural heritage and influence, which given the highly autobiographical nature of the writing (e.g. about upbringing and family) one might expect to see.

This homogenous "white British" ethnicity, middle-class occupations and over-representation of the South-East of England opened an enquiry about whether the label of "Middle-England" could be reasonably assigned to the cohort. Middle England is defined by Holland (2012:7) as 'the heart of the UK. It represents an approximate midpoint of social and political values, a comfortable but aspirant

economic position and is geographically clustered in southeast England, parts of the midlands and suburbia' and more trenchantly as 'a metaphor for respectability, the nuclear family, heterosexuality, conservatism, whiteness and the status quo' (Cannadine 1998:183 in Tomlinson 2001:266). However, as Holland (2012:8) points out, 'Middle England is not an objective ontological category: it is a construction, an interpretation'.

Even if the label has ontological value, the MOP respondents don't fit this neatly. Although disproportionately concentrated in the South East of England and predominantly comfortable financially (though not especially affluent), the majority of ideological partisanship consists of self-alignment with the political left, as Chapter Eight demonstrates. But because they do often live in places associated with "Middle-England", possibly the respondents are somewhat anomalous individuals where they live.

What are the methodological implications of this analysis? Despite the lack of fit to some of the labels and categories explored previously, the picture that emerges does underscore the points made about the lack of representativeness of the panel. However, for researchers who have used the archive, debates about representativeness miss the point about the value of the documents, arguing that variety, not consistency is the crucial aspect of the archive (Pollen 2013; Casey et al 2014). They suggest that the rich, emotional depth of everyday life conveyed in the accounts should be celebrated for its particularity, rather than be held hostage to the 'brutal demands of positivist science' (Highmore 2009 in Pollen 2013:222). At this degree of intimacy, commented Mass Observation co-founder Tom Harrisson, the word 'typical is no longer suitable. No one is privately typical of anyone else' (Harrisson 1990:254 in Pollen 2013:222). But this particularity 'is certainly not individuated individualism' (Pollen 2013:223). As I discovered, responses are often explicitly socially situated and contextual, 'speaking about wider social experience in the context of everyday politics, reflections on history, public attitudes and beyond' (Pollen 2013:223). This 'talk about the nation' (Skey 2011) proved to be particularly useful for my research purposes of trying to understand more about how British people view happiness in their society.

In addition, the skewed sample offers some methodological advantages. As explored through my research questions, particularly question three, the predominance of older, female, white, middle-class and English individuals in the panel may yield some interesting insights into how happiness is shaped or mediated by these factors, while providing opportunities to probe some of the claims made about these groups in happiness surveys. However, care must be taken not to pursue what Skey (2011) terms 'ontological flattening' whereby views are automatically interpreted merely as products of a particular category status or that, with reference to lay normativity (Sayer 2011), the

capacities of individuals as critically reflexive agents are neglected. Also, while fewer in number, as there are working-class, younger and geographically diverse panel respondents, the contribution of these particular voices in gaining insight into experiences and perceptions of happiness should not be overlooked.

Doing Document Analysis

While gathering interpretive data helps gain access 'to the inside experience...the inner reality of humans' (Bryman 2008:367), to understand 'how individuals make sense of their social world and act within it (May 2008:142)' that may yield rich insights into people's biographies, experiences, values, aspirations, attitudes, feelings, memories and motives (May 2008:121), are the MOP documents reliable sources of data? Writing about their use in research strategies, scholars (Mason 2002; Scott 1990; Silverman 2001) caution against reading documents as direct representations of an authentic, objective reality; instead viewing them as something actively constructed and mediated by the person writing. As May (2008) points out, solicited, open archival documents written for public consumption often convey a fashioned reality or self the author wishes to present. This element of performativity was present in the happiness accounts, as Chapter Seven about tackling themes of unhappiness will show. Authors may wish to manage the reader's impressions about the kind of self he/she is. Responses may also be dramatized and embellished or 'demonstrate a desire to please' (Pollen 2013:225) or be characterized by avoidance through a strategy of the 'defended self' (Holloway 2006). Conscious of the purposes of the archive to preserve a repository for researchers to use, respondents with an eye for posterity may be selective in the information they provide, or frame social reality in a way they wish others to accept and advance.

Stanley (2013:6), in the introduction to a series of articles written by researchers of biographical documents, asserts that 'social life involves a vector of temporalities. That is, texts and other life documents provide statements and claims...deployed within the here-and-now although referencing the then-and-gone'. Personal recollections may be both fallible and selective, 'open to change regarding the interpretations made, accounts given and claims advanced'. In terms of respondent disclosure, where life course and personal questions are deployed, these could potentially provoke painful memories and emotions, so that research subjects may sometimes present a 'defended subject' to ward off uncomfortable emotions (Holloway 2006; Bryman 2012). To some degree, this is the inevitable risk of analysing open-ended personal accounts: the very means that can produce such telling and powerful data are the same by which respondents can distort and defend the 'self' they wish others to accept. Also, as Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest, an important part of coding and analysing qualitative data is to incorporate not just these defended strategies but also

omissions, gaps and what is not said or addressed. But as Thin (2012) notes in his appeal for more systematic interpretive happiness research, researchers shouldn't regard attempted manipulation or selectivity as a hindrance but as a necessary part of the analysis- if people are keen to mobilise the impression that their lives have been meaningful or worthwhile, then such appeals or justifications to this end may serve to demonstrate how the concept of happiness is directly connected with what people really care about.

In other respects, the nature of these documents may enhance rather than diminish authenticity. Firstly, 'testimonies gathered by the solitary and anonymous act of writing can be more intimate than that produced by an interview where the person being interviewed may seek to engage or deflect the interviewer, to please them or to guard against them' (Pollen 2013:226). As Fox (2004) comments in her anthropological work, the renowned reticence of British people to divulge personal information in verbal communication is often markedly absent in print, particularly in the more confessional and autobiographical style of writing that many Mass Observation writers adopt. In addition, the invited nature of the contributions, the lack of deadlines or specifications on style and word limit may also 'provide a relative freedom encouraged in the form of the response' (Pollen 2013:220). As I discovered when first encountering the happiness accounts, the physical documents themselves are strikingly diverse: some are over 20 pages long, others only two pages. Some are hand-written, some typed. Personal anonymity is also granted, although participants are asked to include their age, gender, occupation, marital status and place of residence, data which may help to shed light on some of the casual factors of happiness and wellbeing and the way constructs of happiness are mediated but is information not consistently provided by the respondents themselves. In addition, while some responses exhibited a high degree of reflexivity, others were written, especially in responses to Q2 and Q6 in either a limited, descriptive or list-format style, which stymied the ability to extract interpretive data.

So while Scott (1990) suggests researchers approach documents with a healthy skepticism and acknowledging their limitations, weighed against this, the majority of the data offers 'detailed and exceptionally rich accounts of the fibre of everyday life and to reveal the deep complexities of family, personal and intimate life' (Casey et al 2014). It is often these levels of intimacy that surprise and shock researchers, with many moved to tears (Pollen 2013). Indeed this was something I had to grapple with, particularly in the initial read-through of the data corpus where some of the private detail, particularly pertaining to suffering, could provoke quite strong emotions, as my read through of my researcher reflection notes made at the time attest. Mason (2002) also contends that documents in social research are both under-valued and under-used; they can be an excellent

resource in understanding the meanings people attribute to their internal and external world and the ways these meanings are constructed and communicated.

Reflections on doing ‘Secondary Analysis’

The reflective accounts in the MOP archive provided an opportunity to gather rich, often highly personal, biographical and socially engaged interpretations of social phenomena. A lack of face to face interaction, however, may prevent a fuller understanding of any performative intentions of the authors of these accounts, nor can the researcher probe responses or check for meaning. This was particularly frustrating when respondents chose not to reply to certain questions, or when their responses were confusing, or tantalising in the sense of hinting at important contextual information or events. Furthermore, while the questions that the MOP directive asked respondents complies with ‘good practice’ interview guidelines (Morris 2015) that emphasises eliciting rich interpretive data through formulating open questions, keeping the language as accessible as possible and allowing respondents the opportunity to analyse a topic in ways grounded as much as possible in concrete experience, and not be overly abstract in nature (Mason 2002), they were not necessarily worded in a way that I would have chosen. In particular, Question 6, “is there anything that makes you unhappy” felt like a rather apologetic postscript of a question, one almost steering respondents away from a full engagement with this topic, mirroring what Hyman (2011) describes as the tendency in contemporary happiness discourse to shy away from difficult and negative emotions. Luckily, many of the respondents themselves seemed to feel the same way, and their critique of this question provided particularly rich, insightful data about how respondents understood the nature of happiness to be one that included negative emotions, upsetting events and personal shortcomings. Overall, the six questions contained in the directive do allow respondents scope to reply in ways that generates data according to these research principles and, pertaining to my research questions, to causal factors of happiness and unhappiness, the ways in which these link to or reveal what people value and care about, perceptions of happiness across the life course, perceptions of social (un)happiness and critical analysis of the concepts themselves.

One major advantage of doing secondary analysis is gaining access to a large (in this case national) data set which otherwise would not have been available to obtain while also sidestepping many of the time consuming and difficult problems of doing primary research. By added serendipity, the MOP happiness accounts were commissioned recently, making it both a national and relevant data set. Mass Observation, though their long-standing archive, are also a respected institution whose methodologies and research designs others have probed and found to be robust (Moore 2007).

There are however disadvantages of 'piggybacking' on the efforts of others. One concerns the way secondary analysts have to make do with however the research design has been framed and the questions selected. As detailed above, this problem had initially led me to seek more data through additional methods. Additionally, however well it has been described, the process having been controlled by others, despite all the labour-saving implications, means that the whole process including the steering of the research is beyond the knowledge of the secondary analyst, therefore there is always the concern that there may be lacunae in developing a full understanding of the myriad contexts which played a part in the research design and data collection. In the case of the MOP archives, unlike some of the previously mentioned data sets, 'the data is pre-existing but not previously analysed' (Dale et al 1988:13). But although no explanatory analysis, that is, analysis of individual's responses, has been undertaken, objective data about personal characteristics, a person's year of birth, region of residence (nine English regions plus Scotland, Wales and NI), sex and profession and marital status is collated and presented on a spreadsheet by archive staff, as is a breakdown of the cohort to whom a particular directive is sent. But this detailed information you have to ask for, and in some ways, as Moore (2007) also noted on her article about re-using MOP data, this requires cultivating the relevant staff contacts within the organisation who can provide this information. I was fortunate enough to attend a training event organised by MO in May 2015 where I met the relevant staff who later emailed me all this information. On the documents themselves, occasionally the panel don't provide all of the information detailed above they are asked to include with their response.

Ethics

May (2008) makes the point that ethics in research is primarily concerned with the participants. The clear advantage of secondary analysis is that all of the difficult decisions researchers have to take regarding questions of a highly personal nature that could potentially unearth painful emotions and memories have already been taken. Having appraised the documentation sent out to the MOP participant panel, and taking into account the long-standing relationship between staff and participants, informed consent, which according to Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias (1996 in Bryman 2012:475) means participants choosing to participate after having been fully informed of all the facts of the research process which may affect their decision making, has been taken into account. As evidenced by the discrepancy in numbers between those who reply to the directive and the overall cohort to whom the directive is sent, the panel can choose not to respond to a particular directive without having to provide any justification.

Another key ethical issue in research is ‘the preservation of confidentiality and the privacy of people involved’ (Kelly 2008:109). The information MOP provides to secondary analysts who use the archive, while providing some data about individual characteristics, does not include any identifying information. In this research, respondents are given a number from 1-200, and will be referred to in the empirical data chapters as, for example ID14 or ID176. Information about age and sex will be, where relevant, attached to this item as, for example, ID14 M53 for a 53 years old male. On the surface, this research carried negligible risk to participants. However, as a publicly available data-set, some respondents could be identifiable through the content of their responses combined with the albeit limited biographical information and so care was taken to store all of the physical documents in a secure location. In addition, all digital transcripts and data extracts were stored on a password-protected computer. Diener & Crandell (1978 cited in Bryman 2012:472) have identified four key areas of ethical practice: harm to participants; informed consent; safeguarding privacy and honesty. To address the last of these, it is important for the researcher to ensure that MOP respondent data, much of it personal and having required some effort to produce, not be misrepresented or distorted. I have tried wherever possible to substantiate my claims with use of the data extracts themselves, and these can be verified by matching them to the data corpus publicly available at the Mass Observation Archive.

Limitations and Risks

The most obvious limitation of this research concerns the generalizability of the research findings. The sample is both too small and too skewed to make general representations to the population. These limitations concerning generalizability are a feature of adopting a qualitative methodology (Savage 2007; May 2008). While key insights and patterns of association will emerge from qualitative research, any ‘generalizability’ must be hedged (Morris 2015). Instead, the ‘thick descriptions’ of particular cases offer researchers the opportunity to prioritise the value of the telling case (as opposed to the typical one). However, these cases do show how ‘the general principles deriving from some theoretical orientation manifest themselves in some given set of social circumstances...enabling the analyst to establish theoretically valid connections between events and phenomena that were previously ineluctable’ (Mitchell 1984:239 in Pollen 2013:223). Therefore, some tentative theory building and generalisation will be attempted in accordance with the tenets of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006) explored in the next section.

Regarding extracts transcribed from MOP documents, Moore (2007) also points out that this does not automatically lead to exact reproductions of the original, noting that researchers have been known to correct grammar and spelling and even on occasions clarifying awkward sentence

construction. Where I am extracting snippets of data, it is important to faithfully reproduce verbatim quotes and not to take, present or use comments out of context. Capitalisations, other use of expressive language and grammatical errors have been preserved.

Another risk in qualitative research centres around researcher bias, particularly given the large amount of leeway afforded qualitative researchers in generating and analysing the data from these sources. This means that qualitative researchers need to ensure not only their methods but also their processes are transparent. It also means adopting a reflexive, critical approach which pays attention to what Giddens (in Kelly 2008:10) has termed the 'double hermeneutic', the situation whereby researchers interpret another person's interpretation. This requires reflexivity when analysing respondent interpretations, being mindful of the particular context in which they are produced (while remaining faithful to the data respondents provide) and an awareness that analysing data itself is not a passive experience. Researcher's own views and biases may act as a filter through which data is understood, selected, prioritised or omitted (Mason 2002). To enhance reflexivity I took and subsequently transcribed field notes during my visits to the archives and then throughout the subsequent analysis.

Thematic analysis

The research adopted a form of qualitative content analysis called 'Thematic Analysis' where key themes identified in the formation of the research question through the literature review are explicitly sought. Braun & Clarke (2006:77) have argued that though thematic analysis is 'a poorly demarcated and rarely acknowledged' method of analysing qualitative data, it is nonetheless widely used and offers 'an accessible and theoretically flexible approach'. Though thematic analysis, with its emphasis on developing themes in a succinct structure through coding of the data, is a method performed within many qualitative analytic traditions, including Grounded Theory, Semiotics, Narrative and Discourse Analysis, it is increasingly considered and employed as a method in its own right. Bryman (2012:671), writing about Thematic Analysis in the fourth edition of *Social Research Methods*, remarks how the method has only earned a specific section in his book from the third edition onwards due to its emerging importance and popularity among social researchers.

Bryman attributes this popularity of Thematic Analysis to its flexibility, which means, according to Braun & Clarke (2006:78) that it can be 'applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches; for example it can be used in both inductive and deductive approaches'. A theme can be considered as something 'that captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set' (Braun & Clarke 2006:82). Theme identification builds on codes identified through extensive reading

of the text, in this case documents. Ryan and Bernard (2003:87) claim 'you know you have found a theme when you can answer the question, what is this expression an example of?'. They suggest observational techniques that researchers can employ when attempting to identify themes: repetitions, indigenous typologies, metaphors, similarities and differences, missing data, linguistic connectors and transitions.

They also recommend seeking theory-related material. This allows researchers to investigate the way 'qualitative data illuminates questions of importance to social science' (Ryan & Bernard 2003:93) identified in the research questions and the literature review, in this case the way data can illuminate theories about the nature of happiness. Alongside the induction of themes from open coding, the deductive character of Thematic Analysis, that is the prior theorizing of theme-identification, is used to search for theory-related material directly linked to the research questions. In this way, 'themes comes from both the data (an inductive approach) and from the investigator's prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (an a priori approach)' (Ryan & Bernard 2003:94). Ryan and Bernard stress the need to create a balance between the two. An inductive approach can generate fresh ideas and surprising results but may risk losing the connection between the data and the research questions. In a priori theme identification researchers can explicitly seek data related to their research questions but 'must be careful not to find only what they are looking for' (Ryan & Bernard 2003:94).

Prior to theme identification, written materials, in this case archived documents, need to be read and re-read. First, I read through all 200 accounts at the Mass Observation Archives and made initial notes. Subsequently I was able to pay for, from a research fund from Birkbeck University, the whole data corpus to be photocopied by MOP staff and then sent to me. Ideally, I would have sourced these in digital format but the cost was prohibitive. I then scanned the documents into PDF's which then allowed me to use the material on a PC. The next stage of Thematic Analysis is to code the entire data corpus through induction- combing through the text and noting themes as they emerged. This first stage yielded hundreds of codes. One of the issues of identifying key themes in Thematic Analysis is that prevalence is not positively correlated with frequency (Braun & Clarke 2006); building themes from codes is not a question of quantifying or adding up the number of times a certain code appears. Instead, following this initial coding stage, a cutting and sorting technique was employed, 'identifying quotes or expressions that seem somehow important and then arranging these into piles of things that go together' (Ryan & Bernard 2003:104) taking care to note the particular data item and the language used by participants. In this research, theme identification was developed from initial coding and then organised into hierarchies of themes and sub-themes, winnowing these down according to their importance in identifying the main ways respondents

explored experiences and perceptions of happiness and unhappiness and linking these to the theoretical models identified in the research questions.

Research Analysis

The table below presents the six key themes that emerged from analysis of the data, and their sub-categories. As outlined in the Introduction, these six key themes became the titles of the six data chapters that follow this chapter.

Key Theme	Meanings of Happiness	interdependence and Relational Life	Happiness through Meaningful Engagement	Sources of Individual Unhappiness	Social Unhappiness	How Age mediates Happiness
Sub-Theme	Knowability	Intimate Relationships	Flow: immersion plus meaning	Holism	Anti-establishment	intensity v contentment
	Holistic	Family & Domestic Life	Achievement: leisure/ work/ others	Relational Life: Bereavement, conflict, others' suffering, childhood	Left and right critiques	Happy Retirement, Midlife Crisis?
	Hedonic Happiness and its limits	Interpersonal Needs (care, recognition and safety)	Learning & Education	Conduct: mistreatment & mistreating others	Moral decline	Foreboding
	Contentment	Parochial altruism	Elevation/ Transcendence	(non) engagement with unhappiness	'helpless concern'	Age, class and gender
	Social pressure	Significant events	Place	Personal failure	(lack of) Autonomy	Carefree Youth?
	Classical Theories: Eudemonia, Utilitarianism, Epicureanism, Stoicism	Friendships	Social Class	Social Context	Moral Sentiments	Count your (health) blessings
	"British" moderation?	Meaningful Participation/ social contribution			Defended Self	Old age: retrenchment or life well-lived?

Chapter Four: Meanings of Happiness

How knowable is Happiness? As explored in Chapters Two and Three, much of the research about happiness is underpinned by positivist depictions regarding what happiness *is*. This is summarised by Argyle (2001:1) as ‘either that of often being in a state of joy or other positive emotion, or it is being satisfied with one’s life’. However, analysis of the MO accounts complicates this. Happiness emerges as a complex subject, characterised by a diversity of viewpoints about its meaning and doubts about defining it. Here are some examples of responses to Question 1 of the directive: what is happiness and what does it mean to you?

‘What is happiness and what does it mean to me is a difficult question’ (ID4 F51)

‘What a complicated question!’ (ID37 F31)

‘I really am unsure what you mean by happiness’ (ID50 M73)

While happiness might be complex, Argyle (2001) is probably correct that it is not a totally mysterious subject. These responses also support recent qualitative research data showing ‘happiness is a meaningful entity in people’s lives’ (Hyman 2014:23). But this relates more to how happiness functions as a ‘rubric for the good life’ (Thin 2014) and a ‘diagnostic of forms of life’ (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:1) rather than something that can be precisely defined. As Sayer (2011:8) comments: ‘when we ask people how they are they usually have no trouble telling us, but they would probably be stumped by abstract questions such as- what is wellbeing or flourishing’. As one respondent put it: ‘I know some things that make me happy but can I describe what happiness is?’ (ID6 F66).

Baggini (2008:3) suggests that most people ‘operate according to an implicit value system, a sense of what the good life entails...everyone carries round with them a set of assumptions about the fundamental nature of the world’. At the same time, ‘most people aren’t able to tell you what their metaphysical framework is’ (Baggini 2008:3). The problem of eliciting people’s explicit understanding of happiness could be reflected in the fact that almost half the cohort do not directly answer Q1. Yet almost all of these have no problems answering Q2 concerning sources of happiness. As indicated by ID6’s comment above, happiness may need to be experienced to become known and this preference for concrete examples over abstract reasoning about the nature of happiness could link to an empiricist British/English cultural outlook identified in Chapter Two (Easthope 1999; Fox 2004; Baggini 2008).

Some respondents who express uncertainty use this as an opening gambit to ‘feel their way in’ to reflecting about what happiness is or might be. In so doing, they draw a range of ‘public repertoires’

(Savage 2007). These include dictionary definitions, cartoons, cultural commentators, comedians, adverts, celebrities like the Dalai Lama and popular commentators on happiness. These references are examples of how happiness narratives connect to national identity whereby a person's commentary 'reflects the idea that they live in and belong to nations' (Skey 2011:38) by virtue of particular cultural references (Ken Dodd, Eeyore and Alan Bennett get two mentions each). Also, in the example of the Dalai Lama, they may draw on what Mathews (2012) terms the 'global cultural supermarket', a more internationalist and cosmopolitan cultural script.

Another problem with the knowability of happiness lies in its relative or contingent nature. 'It all depends', one respondent observes. For another happiness depends 'on where you are, who you are with and your stage in life' (ID5 F39), depicting happiness as something that may change across the life-course (Thin 2012). Continuing this theme of contingency, one of the oldest respondents in the cohort emphasises the subjective nature of happiness:

'happiness is one of those words difficult to define simply because one person's happiness or reason for being in that state would not necessarily be another's' (ID146 M91)

The diverse ways that subjects experience happiness shows the problem, as explored in Chapter Three, of creating a standardised or one-size-fits-all happiness measure. For other respondents, locating happiness within the wellbeing or needs tradition (Dean 2009), happiness is contingent upon objective, social conditions and circumstances perceived to be conducive to flourishing. These include concepts of material sufficiency, illustrated by the following comments by respondents across a range of ages:

'happiness would seem to depend on material comfort or security' (ID107 M55)

'having enough money to pay for more than essentials' (ID93 F92)

'Not having to worry about money too much' (ID109 F39)

These excerpts echo much of the literature (UNSDN 2019; Layard 2011) about the relationship between money and happiness and the importance of having basic material needs met rather than the pursuit of wealth or materialism itself. One respondent, who equates happiness with not having to worry about money, links the concept of material sufficiency to freedom, echoing Sen's (1999) Capabilities Theory about the freedom to choose a life one values:

'We aren't rich but we don't worry at the end of the month. I know people who do and it has a big impact on what they can do. The fact I have the freedom to do most things I want is something I feel very happy about' (ID109 F39)

The use of 'we' by this respondent, who is married, also highlights a theme emerging through recent qualitative research (e.g. Cieslik 2017) where happiness is portrayed as a collaborative process rather than something individualistic. For many respondents, happiness is a relational entity, inextricably bound up with others. As one puts it, 'to me happiness is very much about relationships' (ID161 F45).

One of the reasons for the significance of relational happiness, as Sayer (2011) has suggested, is our being needy, socially situated beings, who to some degree require esteem and care from others to flourish. For one respondent, 'a feeling of contentment and satisfaction' is directly linked to being 'loved, cherished, needed and wanted' (ID184). This relational aspect is heightened by sensitivity and vulnerability to loss - as much as needs can be satisfied through relationships, they can also be thwarted. Relationships can be risky attachments, one respondent writing how relationships bring joy but 'they can hurt me' (ID41 M35). Another writes: 'as a wise woman once said to me - what makes you happy? Other people. What makes you unhappy? Other people' (ID155 M83).

Simplifying causal messages that relationships leads to happiness (Walker & Kavedžija 2015) obscure this dual nature of engagement. The pursuit of valued aspects of life like relationships are risky because they can lead to pain as well as joy. This is held by one respondent to contain a more general truth in that 'often the same thing that might make you happy on one side makes you unhappy on the other side' (ID48 F32). In this sense, happiness and unhappiness interact and become co-mingled because of the myriad possibilities of social engagement (Cieslik 2017).

The knowability of happiness is also problematised by the 'time-preference' (Thin 2012:324) respondents adopt. In a life-course perspective, an episode of happiness or unhappiness is significant for how to it came to be retrospectively understood rather than how it was experienced at the time. This was something explored in various responses from respondents at different stages of their lives; this retrospective attitude is not only the preserve of those who have had longer to reflect:

'I'm sure we've all looked back at times in our past and thought "I was happy then" and at the same time we recognise that we were not really aware of it at the time' (ID53 F66)

'it can also be a retrospective thing. Last summer, before I lost my mum, I also felt quite anxious and miserable at times, as I do now. But this year I look back and life looks so carefree- "all my troubles seem so far away". I didn't feel happy at the time but now I know I was' (ID25 F27)

‘In my experience it's only after a painful event that you can look back and see how dreadful it was compared to how things are now’ (ID178 F40)

Happiness, in these different interpretations, is not a ‘factual entity’ (Thin 2014) but something more processual, knowable in terms of its place within the overall journey; it is mutable and ideas about what it is can change. Even fondly remembered times have bittersweet elements. Q3 and 4 of the Directive ask respondents to write about their ‘happiest day’ and whether they would wish to relive it. Memories of happy days, states one, ‘fill me with nostalgia and regret’ (ID174 F80) because of the loss that came after.

The deeper ‘temporal orientation’ (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:6) of these accounts where happiness is inextricably linked with the stories people tell about their lives, substantiate Thin’s (2012:316) analysis of how happiness narratives become part of a ‘holistic appreciation of life as a complex organic whole in which a master-plot is interwoven with a variety of subplots, characters and dramas’. Moments of happiness become comprehensible for how they relate to the overall journey or as critical moments or turning points (Thin 2012), problematising the notion of understanding experiences solely by how one feels at the time. One way in which episodes are recounted as “happy” but were not necessarily experienced as such is connected by one respondent to ideas about personal growth and achievement:

‘There are lots of occasions, often quite difficult or stressful ones, that only become seen as ‘happy’ with the benefit of hindsight. All the stress of making speeches, getting exam results, travelling to new places, being thrown together with unfamiliar people would not, at the time, result in happiness, although, looking back from the safety of the future, I would often describe such things as happy occasions. Perhaps the happiness in such situations comes more from ‘having done’ than from doing’ (ID61 F45)

Stressful and challenging experiences like exams are understood here as happy moments not for their affective properties but in the sense of achievement that they confer, connect to wider themes of self-development and meaningful projects and goals that echo eudemonic happiness traditions explored in Chapter Two (Vitterso 2016). As two other respondents stress, this is why significant days like weddings or childbirth may be said to be memorable rather than happy, because of what they enabled and contributed to and not because they felt good at the time — they are instead critical moments or stepping stones (Thin 2012) towards happiness.

‘Having children is certainly memorable, but the stress factor for father and certainly mother can make it far from happy, again it is the long-term effect that leads to happiness’ (ID163 M67)

‘I suppose they are really emblematic days, signifying the start of a promising new stage of life, rather than actual physical spans of time to be itemised for the amount of unalloyed happiness they contain’ (ID22 M46)

‘Holistic’ Happiness

A more holistic interpretation of happiness is also one which moves beyond the idea of happiness as positive affect to one involving a balance of positive and negative events (Cieslik 2014). One idea frequently expressed by respondents is how the ability to understand, experience and appreciate happiness presupposes the existence of unhappiness, as the following comments show:

‘Of course there are loads of things that make me unhappy, otherwise I wouldn’t know what happiness was’ (ID171 F65)

‘I think that the troubles of life have to be experienced in order to realise when you are happy’ (ID120 M35)

As explored in Chapter Two, the emergence of Happiness Studies illustrates how, in the West, rising expectations have led to happiness being seen as one’s personal right (McMahon 2013). Yet the two above comments imply tempering expectations of how much happiness it is possible to experience. Also, in relation to what Baggin (2008) calls ‘folk philosophy’- lay beliefs about the nature of the good life- they show an inclination towards a ‘naturalistic’ understanding that happiness is limited in quantity or scope (Walker & Kavedžija 2015) and only becomes knowable through the co-presence of unhappiness. Therefore, from a holistic perspective, happiness assumes a richer but also more paradoxical character ‘in that the positive experiences we commonly associate with happiness rely for their meaning and significance on the negative events in our lives- the hardships we all encounter as humans’ (Cieslik 2014:5-6).

Furthermore, as the previous and following excerpts show, happiness, commonly portrayed in the West as something individuals have responsibility for (Walker & Kavedžija 2015; Mathews 2012) and create for themselves, is instead something that happens to them. Individual responsibility in this sense is more passive- appreciating or valuing these experiences when they arrive:

‘life certainly has its ups and downs, if it were all up, we should not appreciate it’ (ID175 M65)

‘If we want to truly value the lightness of life we have to accept the corresponding darkness’
(ID31 M42)

In Sayer’s (2011) depiction of a human agent who is capable of both flourishing and suffering, the concept of happiness and wellbeing becomes grounded in the knowledge that life can go well but also badly. And without the bad, the good can’t really be appreciated: ‘the good in our lives takes its meaning and significance from the challenges, struggle and suffering we have to endure’ (Cieslik (2014:427). For another respondent, it is precisely this experience of a range of positive and negative events and emotional states which contributes to a deeper understanding of their life:

‘Life is a process of learning about yourself and the world around you, and although I might have learnt things the hard way, those experiences only add to the texture of life’ (ID200 M28)

Therefore, testing times can be prudential. They are, as another respondent puts it, the ‘occasional dips that make us better our lot’ (ID195 F45). In this model, a life without unhappiness would not be a desirable state even it were feasible. One respondent writes about how chancing on notes written by her daughter revealed this more holistic character of happiness:

‘My 12 year old daughter has a habit of writing down quotes about life. I think it's what girls of her age do, and I'm not sure if she completely appreciates them. But to my surprise a handwritten quote appeared in the kitchen last week: "Without pain how can we recognise happiness?" I can identify with that’ (ID178 F40)

Therefore, if happiness is only knowable through its counterpart, unhappiness, a happy life defined by an absence of negative emotions becomes a logical inconsistency. If the previous quote suggests that this outlook can be inter-generational, does it also represent a broader cultural perspective? As explored in Chapter Two, an empiricist inclination was held to be a signifier of Englishness/ Britishness in accounts of national identity (Easthope 1999; Fox 2004; Baggini 2008) and the “holistic” views presented so far are empiricist in being grounded in concrete experience rather than abstract ideas. And practical experience, for many respondents, suggests that life or a person can rarely be viewed in binary ways as completely happy or unhappy:

‘I have happy days and not so happy days, days when I feel positive and full of joy and days when I don't’ (ID91 F63)

‘In as much as I can feel great joy...I can also feel great unhappiness’ (ID110 F67)

‘I would say I am neither happy nor unhappy, but have temporary bouts of both interspersed with the reality of normal life’ (ID120 M35)

ID120’s description of ‘normal life’ is instructive with regards an informal empiricist outlook grounded in practical, everyday experience. Many respondents perceive that happy and unhappy merge and interact, they are episodic and part and parcel of the range of experiences across life-as-a-whole. Thin (2012) writes about how biographical and narrative accounts are often characterised by a sense of order, of life appearing to contain certain knowable patterns and characteristics. For many respondents, the concept of happiness is grounded in a naturalistic understanding of what a typical and authentic life is like.

‘It seems rather odd to expect happiness as your default setting’ (ID22 M46)

‘I don't think it's natural to be happy all day, every day’ (ID122 F28)

‘I don't think people can always be in a happy state, Happiness is a feeling relative to normality’ (ID120 M35)

Such is the commitment to a “natural” perspective of happiness, that, for another respondent, one should be extremely sceptical about a person exhibiting a state of perennial happy disposition, exclaiming ‘people who are always Happy- what is wrong with them!’ (ID29 F33). The implication here is that permanent happiness is not only inauthentic but also “unnatural”. Another respondent, while emphasising that he prefers not to spend time with ‘miserable people’ emphasises how ‘a candid confession of unhappiness does a lot to make another person real to me’ (ID22 F46).

One drawback of a naturalistic perspective is its sociological limitations. Assertions of “common-sense” about what life is “like” can engender conformist and conservative versions of the good life, so that habits, phrases and particular ways of thinking and looking at the world become ‘sedimented’ (Skey 2011) and solidified into particular cultural “truths” which are in fact highly contingent on spatial and temporal contexts. Looking at keywords used by some of the respondents above, ‘normality’, ‘natural’, ‘default’ (and in relation to alternative positions, odd), we can see how perspectives that deviate from this idea of authenticity could be delegitimised and dismissed.

Nevertheless, in identifying how happiness is plotted according to a perceived sense of order, many respondents view a ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ life as delimiting positive emotional states. This is an essentially moderate perspective much in evidence in these accounts: happy and unhappy experiences are perceived as part and parcel of life’s inevitable ups-and downs, episodes that are components of the overall journey, which, reflects ID120, ‘I’ll take as they come’. These peaks and troughs, for another respondent, are connected to key domains of wellbeing:

‘We all have bad patches - times when things are bad, whether it be health, wealth, matters of the heart, work matters’ (ID53 F66)

These ‘things’ – health, wealth, relationship, work- matter to agents and can be the causes of both flourishing and suffering because of our capacity to fare well or badly in these domains (Sayer 2011). Therefore, episodes of unhappiness are the inevitable costs of human engagement. In the way respondents ground the coexistence of happiness and unhappiness in their everyday and past experience, living becomes what Jackson (2011:1 in Thin 2012:325) terms a ‘field of struggle’, where things go well and badly, and actors have to make fallible judgements and choices regarding these.

The normative implications of a ‘holistic’ perspective where happiness and unhappiness co-exist, is to become more circumspect about individual capabilities and to adjust expectations to a more realistic viewpoint. As one respondent asserts, ‘you can’t be happy without being unhappy and people need to accept that’ (ID117 F35). (This excerpt does highlight a possible paradox pertaining to the ‘happiness in moderation’ perspective whereby views preaching moderation are expressed so strongly!) Her prescription that individuals accept unhappiness as inevitable could also be interpreted as a tacit rebuke to popular ideas of happiness as a permanently positive place ‘potentially within the grasp of each individual and attainable largely through his or own actions’ (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:8).

The idea of happiness as a holistic ‘whole’ (or wheel with its ups and downs) also connects to classical ideas concerning the role of fortune (McMahon 2006). This tradition stresses that ‘happiness could only be achieved through some miraculous, divine intervention or blessing...deemed to be beyond human agency, a matter of luck or fortune, fragile and highly contingent upon external conditions’ (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:8) and is therefore antithetical to the contemporary idea of happiness presented as the result and responsibility of individual agency. As Nussbaum (2001) describes, in classical Greek theatre and literature, happiness is a state of being only fit for the Gods and not something mere mortals can expect to possess. Furthermore, any expectations, complacency or manoeuvrings on the part of human subjects regarding the possession or attainment of happiness constitutes hubris; the consequences of which are likely to include disappointment, punishment or disaster, as witnessed in the fates of the protagonists (McMahon 2006). Some respondents echo this idea of the fragility of human happiness, particularly how complacency about positive states can make one a hostage to fortune.

‘Years ago, a friend, whose home life was difficult in many ways, remarked to me that my home seemed happy and contented. I said "yes, we do seem to have charmed lives". Not

long after that my brother committed suicide, and life was never the same again for any of us' (ID53 F66)

'Everytime I'm happy I have a feeling that either something will go wrong and spoil it or that the happy feeling won't last' (ID140 M49)

While ID40 depicts misfortune as something that haunts or casts a shadow over happy times, the moral lesson of ID53's story seems clearer: fate has been tempted and punishment duly administered. Unlike the Greek playwrights, these respondents don't (presumably) believe in vengeful deities, however they do express a vague belief that events are externally designed. This highlights a paradox with the empiricist outlook. Empiricism, 'the philosophy that knowledge is derived from sense-experience' (Fox 2004:403), was identified previously as shaping concepts of happiness in these accounts, respondents emphasising that moderate expectations are developed through (reflecting on) concrete experience, particularly the "normal" and "natural" ups and downs of everyday engagement.

However, this informal empiricism should not be confused with Empiricism understood by Engelke's (2015) English humanists (explored in Chapter Two) as a rationalist, scientific doctrine because an individual's evaluation of subjective experience could lead to distinctly unscientific truth claims: 'reason, for most people means their own opinion (and) reason and opinion are not always the same thing' (Engelke 2015:71). One way reason and opinion become separated is when 'common-sense tells us that things happen for a reason...that the coincidence is too strange' (Baggini 2008:63). In ID53's comment above, a declaration of living a charmed life becomes connected causally with a sharp downturn of fortune: 'because we are deeply wired to cause and effect, we see hidden patterns and purpose in coincidences and bad luck (Baggini 2008:64). These superstitious tendencies are also expressed in another respondent's reluctance to imagine her happiest day:

'My happiest day may be yet to come But I'm certainly not going to try and imagine it in case I jinx it' (ID85 F71)

The ability to 'jinx' something is the belief that 'the world remembers what happens in the past when ordering itself' (Baggini 2008:64) and punishes or rewards to restore equity or equilibrium to the natural order. This idea of externally composed order or balance problematises the idea that personal responsibility for happiness is a core belief in Western cultures. It may be completely irrational in a scientific sense but it may also indicate a preference for a philosophy of justice based on reciprocity for one's actions as karma and just deserts (Banks 2004). This will be revisited in subsequent chapters, particularly in relation to interpersonal personal conduct.

Hedonic Happiness and its limits

However limited in scope and whoever is responsible for it, what does happiness consist of? The subjective experience of positive emotions is a key pillar of global happiness measures (UNSDN 2019) and it has been suggested that 'for most people in the West today, happiness is about feeling good' (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:2). About half of the respondents who grapple with Q1 of the directive about the meaning of happiness do explicitly locate happiness within the affective or hedonic tradition explored in Chapter Two (Vitterso 2016; Pavot & Diener 2013). As one respondent puts it, 'a combination of some or all of the positive 'feelings' is what could be deemed happiness' (ID137 F49).

In the responses, there are many types and qualities of emotions depicted as or associated with happiness. These can be pleasures experienced in everyday situations, what one respondent calls 'the small things'. This chimes with Cieslik's (2017) research about how happiness is connected to the ordinary and quotidian and also in Skey's (2012:84) work where pleasures are experienced through the 'spatial and temporal regularities' of everyday life. Equally, emotional happiness can be characterised as intense, memorable and heightened sensory experiences, as the following comments show:

'a sudden, piercing feeling of delight which, while it's much more focused and intense, lasts only a very short time' (ID107 M55)

'Happiness is that feeling of being transported to a place where there are no cares, where everything is right with the world' (ID98 M43)

These more intense and elevated feelings (Haidt 2003) set against everyday pleasures highlight a key dichotomy in the representation of affective happiness. For researchers like Diener (1999), happiness is an umbrella term which incorporates all of these different emotions. He also acknowledges that this premise is contested: is happiness a separate and unique emotion or is it a bundle of all different kinds of affective states? (Vitterso 2016). For one respondent, the extremely broad palette of emotions can't be reduced to something termed 'happiness':

'Here are some other words which might better describe how certain events make me feel. Joyous, satisfied, carefree, delighted, thrilled, contented, exuberant, pleased, ecstatic, peaceful, proud, buoyant, positive, overawed, grateful, calm, euphoric, blessed, stimulated, unworried, - or, quite simply, in a good mood' (ID33 M70)

This respondent, reflecting further on the term, critiques the unrevealing and simplified idea of lumping together such a wide variety of feelings and experiences under one, unified category:

‘I can say "yes- I'm quite happy at the moment." But that sort of “feeling happy” isn't very revealing. It doesn't capture the strength or range of positive emotions’ (ID33 M70)

Here happiness, far from incorporating the whole range of affective states, is a term that cannot do justice to the diversity or intensity of different emotions. However, one aspect of emotional states that most respondents can agree on is their fleeting nature. Almost half of those responding to Q1 mentioned this and for some, fleetingness is precisely what makes these experiences so memorable and special:

‘I think of happiness as being so rare and precious that it happens only very occasionally as a particular feeling in the pit of one's stomach -warm, indescribable, all-embracing’ (ID40 F86)

Here, happiness is made both knowable and valuable by its absence as much as its presence. In addition, from this excerpt we learn something about the physiological structure of affective happiness as something bodily located (in the stomach) and which also has a (warm) temperature. But if this seems reliably solid and physical, something which could be captured or measured, then it is also according to ID40 ‘indescribable’, a paradoxical coupling which underlines the simultaneously real and slippery nature of happiness, and the problems facing happiness researchers in reifying happiness as a scientific construct.

Who or what is responsible for creating these emotions? (Walker & Kavedžija 2015). Further problematising the western cultural expectation that individuals are responsible for creating their own happiness (Mathews 2012), for many respondents these emotional states cannot be controlled or directly pursued, they emerge indirectly, often unexpectedly. This capricious nature of happiness is captured by two respondents, at different stages of life but in very similar terms:

‘happiness...is like a little bird that lands unbidden on your shoulder. You never know when it will happen’ (ID195 F45)

‘it cannot be planned or artificially stimulated or guaranteed in advance, and their duration cannot be predicted or controlled - they just happen’ (ID21 M84)

One of the reasons philosophers like Kant rejected happiness as the ultimate human aim lies precisely with this problem (McMahon 2006), what Aristotle (2004:250) identified as the problem ‘of putting oneself directly into pleasure’. This also underlines a “paradox of happiness” explored in the Literature Review- you can only get it as a by-product of something else. As one respondent puts it, ‘I believe that the essence of our human happiness is that it's fleeting and so often unexpected, and can't be wished or forced into existence’ (ID107 M55).

Happiness is an inherently normative matter because it ‘makes a claim about what is most desirable and worthwhile in a person’s life’ (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:1) and this elusive characteristic of happiness invites some respondents to adopt a broader and more generalising critical stance towards happiness conceptualised as the direct pursuit of increased hedonic satisfactions and pleasures (Thin 2012). Using the playwright and author Alan Bennett as her reference point (and thus demonstrating a link between happiness narratives and national identity by using culturally specific reference points (Skey 2011)), ID198 captures a wider “truth” about how ‘the direct pursuit of one’s own individual happiness very often fails’ (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:15):

‘I think it was Alan Bennett who observed that happiness is a fleeting moment rather than a permanent state. Yet people have a tendency to continually look forward to happier times. But there is always something wrong somewhere’ (ID198 F41)

This scepticism about the direct pursuit of hedonic sensations is further underlined by responses to q5 of the directive, which invites respondents to imagine their happiest day to come. Some respondents simply reject the premise of the question; since their future is unknown, why speculate? But this reticence is partly explained by what is perceived by many as the false promise of the ‘future perfect’ (McMahon 2006), where, as ID198 puts it, ‘I will be happy when I achieve this’ or ‘I will be happy when this event happens’. This illusory quality to the pursuit of happiness is echoed by two other respondents:

‘when exposed to any sustained thought is utterly preposterous. A state of pure joy where every horizon is free from clouds and every bet placed wins would be impossible’ (ID31 M42)

‘the largely mythical abstractions of people being constantly happy or suffused with happiness over a long period, when the reality is that true happiness is often quite a fleeting emotion’ (ID81 M)

These excerpts illustrate Sayer’s (2004) point about the way lay normative evaluations can slip into more objective appraisals: happiness aspirations based on acceptance of its limits and lack of individual control is held to be what “ought” or “should” be adopted. But this awareness seems to run counter to happiness promoted in western cultures of ‘feeling good—enjoying life and wanting the feeling to be maintained’ (Layard 2005:12 in Walker & Kavedžija 2015:7) since the feeling cannot be maintained and proves ‘elusive when pursued outright’ (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:16).

These moderate expectations do however align with research about English or British perspectives of the good life. For Fox (2004:403), moderation is a core English cultural ‘reflex’, denoting an

‘avoidance of extremes, excess and intensity’, a preference for the ‘happy medium’ and more pejoratively a rather unadventurous and unimaginative outlook that speaks of ‘sheer ordinariness’. This notion of moderate expectations of happiness is also taken up by Baggin (2008). In attempting to ‘identify what the dominant philosophy of England added upto’ (Baggin 2008:3) he writes about encountering generally modest aspirations and concludes that ‘people were comfortable and didn’t aspire to much more’ (Baggin 2008:96). As explored previously, a moderate outlook is that happiness as good feeling has a limited supply and that believing otherwise is somewhat fanciful. The words and phrases selected by respondents in the previous two excerpts – ‘preposterous’ and ‘mythical abstractions’ echo what Fox (2004:64) calls ‘a candidate for the national catchphrase: “oh, come off it!”’, a deep scepticism for grandiose theory and a preference for the factual, practical and common-sense. This is encapsulated by one response to the idea of future happiness. Here moderation works both ways; excessive unhappiness is also delimited.

‘happiness isn’t a state, where you just arrive and stay there and never leave- The Happy Ever After Retirement Home. Life is about constant change and uncertainty, so you can have lots of moments of happiness but you will never get one continuous golden chunk. Happiness comes in little pieces but so does unhappiness: you won’t get an awful, dark stretch that is completely unrelieved either’ (ID117 F35)

Another limitation to hedonic happiness mooted by researchers (Lyubomirsky 2010) lies in its uneven ‘genetic endowment’ (Mathews 2012:306). For some respondents, how happy one is or feels is a birth-lottery, something innate rather than something that can be controlled or pursued. As one respondent puts it: ‘I do think that we have varying capacities for such feelings’ (ID21 M84). That these ‘capacities’ have more to do with one’s innate nature or biological constitution than any conscious choice is reflected in the way some respondents talk in essentialist (and again, informally empiricist) terms about their “nature”. One respondent states ‘I am a happy person by nature - definitely a glass-half full type of guy’ (ID38 M71) while another concludes that ‘I think that basically I have a happy disposition- not easily irritated or taking offence’ (ID67 F90).

Innateness cuts both ways. If pre-determined happy types exist, then the reverse is equally true. As one respondent reflects, ‘my natural disposition is that of Eeyore. This is a trait I’m not particularly proud of, but it’s true. I do try and consciously change it I always try to think of others worse off than me, cherish the moment etc. but inevitably I slip back into dour mode’ (ID43 F44). However, as we saw earlier in one respondent’s suspicion of permanently cheerful people, a sunny disposition isn’t necessarily something to be envied. Echoing earlier themes of ‘holistic’ and ‘authentic’ happiness

involving a balance of positive and negative emotions (Cieslik 2014), one respondent is aware that radiating positivity may be viewed as “unnatural”:

‘People have told me over the years “you are always smiling!” which in some ways I’m not too keen on because sometimes people who are “always smiling” can come across as insincere’ (ID50)

Neither do those of a more lugubrious character, in an interesting example of second-order thinking regarding happiness (White 2006), necessarily feel unhappy about feeling unhappy. ID43 again: ‘I often get people telling me to cheer up when I’m feeling perfectly fine!’. Another respondent considers ‘that you can be miserable without being an unhappy person’. This shows the limitations of conceptualising happiness as a greater quantity of subjectively experienced positive affect, a more whole or complete idea of the happy life requires a more ‘realistic’ perspective, providing further indications of an empiricist inclination for the factual over the fanciful.

Happiness as social pressure

A critique of what one respondent terms ‘happiness as it is popularly imagined’ (ID31 M42) synonymous with pleasurable emotions, informs how some respondents frame their understanding of happiness as a social and cultural phenomenon. This was perceived largely negatively as unrealistic version of happiness, that, one respondent asserts, ‘has been sold to us, as a kind of perfectionism...like the D Day landings, a vast operation depending on multiple parts working perfectly and doomed to failure if just one goes wrong’ (ID31 M42). This is a good example of the way respondents deploy what Thin (2012:322) terms ‘idiosyncratic root metaphors’ to develop their points and also shows how respondents’ display a sense of their own national belonging and self-identity through ‘engagements with cultural narratives’ (Thin 2012:321), in this case ‘common stocks of historical knowledge’ (Skey 2011:35) like World War Two that readers are presumed to understand.

Acknowledging the powerful societal norms that undergird ideas about happiness, other respondents analysed the nature of happiness through and often in resistance to a seductive but illusory notion of “perfect happiness” they believe is being perpetuated through the media and other social institutions. One respondent relates this through a discussion about happiness she had with a friend:

‘I was trying to explain to her that I don’t think happiness is a constant state, we are led to believe it by the capitalist society we live in, so that we keep buying things to make us

happy, but happiness is always moving away from us, so that we have to do more and buy more and we'll never get there' (ID29 F33)

On the one hand, this comment echoes the idea of happiness as a 'hedonic treadmill' (Layard 2011) explored in Chapter Two. It also expresses resistance to a hegemonic idea about happiness and the pressure this produces. For other respondents, this pressure entails not only aiming for happiness but to also appear to be happy. One office administrator writes about encountering these dramaturgical (Goffman 1990) tendencies in the workplace:

'One of the reasons I don't engage with social media is that it seems to involve a pressure to present yourself as happy...Whenever somebody at work shows me something on their Facebook page, for example, all the pictures are of them looking happy, doing socially acceptable fun things...there was an article in The Guardian a while ago by a journalist apparently 'living the life' as an up and coming bright young thing in London in which she confessed to the dispiriting amount of effort it took to maintain the illusion of success and happiness via her Facebook profile' (ID22 M46)

The way in which he and other respondents describe happiness as having a performative quality (Hyman 2014) through constructing a "happy self" presented to the public gaze connects to some of the sociological critiques about contemporary happiness agendas (Furedi 2004; Davies 2015; Ahmed 2010) and its manipulative effect on ordinary people. As one respondent puts it:

'culturally, we get people acting out happiness, rather than genuinely emoting.... happiness is faked in modern society mostly due to people trying to live up to unrealistic expectations' (ID81 M)

These reflections have significance not just in terms of what is said about happiness but also how it is said (Savage 2007). The use of "we" in this and previous excerpts reflects what Skey (2011:23) terms 'deixis...a form of rhetorical pointing' that signifies a belief both that one belongs to a nation but also in the confidence of membership. What is telling is the confident way writers adopt a position of cultural judgement. In Chapter three the significance of MO respondents' middle-class and ethnic majority status was explored in relation to how this shapes happiness accounts. Linked to the concept of 'national cultural capital' (Hage 1998), one possible consequence of belonging to a more privileged social class/group is in positioning oneself as 'the legitimate arbiter of values, norms and social practices within the nation' (Skey 2013:92). This confidence is all the more clear when it denotes awareness of powerful cultural norms but not in the fatalistic sense that 'one has no choice but to follow' (Mathews 2012:307).

This confidence connects to Savage's (2007) analysis of Mass Observers and the ease with which as 'knowing research subjects' they demonstrate their autonomy and individuality by evoking cultural classifications and categories in order to demonstrate their independence from them, for example ID81's comment about the way 'culturally, we get people acting out happiness' whilst implying he is able to resist this behaviour and rise above popular trends. This self-confidence is also evident in a critique of how the popular promotion of happiness both creates and reflects individualistic and narcissistic norms. One respondent contrasts these norms with her generation:

'I think that part of the reason that people feel unhappy is because they expect too much of life. My childrens' generation are pampered and risk averse, and they are brought up to expect that the world revolves around them. I have tried not to do this to my children. I think that being faced with disappointment and stress in small amounts is how real life is, and many people nowadays don't know how to cope when they have to deal with that' (ID178 F40)

Although comparatively youthful in the context of the Mass Observation Panel, her comments also signify how respondents 'split off' (Hoggett 2003) from mainstream norms by locating them in younger and more susceptible age groups. Furthermore, her comment that 'real' life undermines this entitled expectation of happiness links to holistic and empiricist perspectives explored previously about the unattainable state of permanent positive emotion. For her, these expectations lead to unhappiness when they are (inevitably) unsatisfied. As a consequence, happiness becomes burdened by a sense of failure and shame. This is something another respondent reflects on:

'someone who is unhappy is looked upon as someone with a problem...yet paradoxically, those who look upon the unhappy person may themselves be faking happiness for the sake of projecting an image' (ID81 M)

This respondent expands his theme through the Government-backed UK Happiness Index (ONS 2019). He regards this as an enterprise unlikely to gauge the true state of national or social wellbeing because of the need to present oneself as satisfied with life. His comments reflect a methodological critique of large-scale Happiness surveys explored in the previous chapter about the way 'impression management' (ESRC 2012; Thin 2012) can distort self-reporting.

'reminding myself of the now virtually forgotten attempt to take some sort of political survey of happiness in the UK. I would say that this is virtually impossible given the propensity to cover up happiness...I think it would be difficult to get people to admit to their true level of happiness' (ID81 M)

This comment, by explicitly reflecting on happiness studies while participating in its production also highlights Giddens' (1991) concept of the "double hermeneutic" whereby social scientific research becomes incorporated into accessible cultural stocks of knowledge and where individuals and research subjects 'draw on the kinds of knowledge being produced about them in the name of academic social science to as resources that they can use to mobilise their own identities' (Savage 2007).

In Chapter Two, I critiqued the sociological reluctance to take happiness seriously as reflecting a pessimistic disciplinary understanding of 'modernity as a problem' (Cieslik 2017; Thin 2014). However, the views presented in this section clearly give succour to this sociological stance. In critiquing cultural representations of happiness, respondents echo points made by critical commentators of the happiness agenda (e.g. Davies 2015; Ahmed 2010). It may highlight a largely university-educated professional middle-cohort who are able draw on sociologically influenced cultural narratives to distance themselves from what is deemed the 'popular imagination' of happiness. It may also reflect a particularly middle-class version of happiness concerned with delegitimising a more "vulgar" popular culture of easily accessible and consumable set of sensory pleasures (Savage 2007; Baggini 2008) deemed to be of lower value. This stance can be traced back to the historical canon of happiness literature (Mill 1989; Aristotle 2004).

On the other hand, as Sayer emphasizes (2011), abstracting personal reflexivity to class identity or social position negates to an alienating degree the ability of agents to grapple with and transcend cultural and class identities. In addition, while anthropologists like Mathews (2012) are keen to demonstrate how cultural discourses shape popular beliefs, these discourses are multiple; while they can overlap they can also compete and to some extent individuals can pick and choose between them (Sayer 2011). Mathews also makes the point that while happiness is culturally-influenced it is also acutely individual 'because of our nature as human beings' (Mathews 2012:306), something individuals must agonize over and negotiate themselves.

These responses demonstrate how it is possible to think about happiness without subscribing to a particular version of it, to be bombarded with social norms yet resist these (Archer 2001). Therefore, these responses simultaneously validate and problematise the rather pessimistic happiness narratives arising out of key sociological accounts. They concord with their key message: happiness is about a social performance with implications of personal failure for those unable to live up to these aesthetic norms (Ahmed 2010); yet they undermine the apparent consequence of this, how agents uncritically absorb these discourses and embody their illusions. Here respondents present rather than embody these in order to grapple with and critique them.

Also significant is that respondents were critiquing a particular version, not the notion of happiness per se. An example is provided by one respondent who writes critically about how ‘people put a lot of stock in happiness and also tend to expect things or other people to make them happy’ (ID115 F31) but, instead of then dismissing happiness as a subject, goes on to redefine it as the cultivation of contentment that acts as an antidote to these unrealistic expectations. It is to this idea of happiness as contentment that I now turn.

Contentment

About a third of respondents who responded to Q1 of the directive depict happiness as meaning or being synonymous with contentment, as these three excerpts from respondents of different ages and sex show:

‘To me happiness means contentment’ (ID129 M74)

‘To answer this question in an over-simplified manner I can only say that being contented makes me happy’ (ID140 M49)

‘happiness for me is when you are at your most content’ (ID37 F31)

But what is contentment or to be contented? One way of understanding the term is to link it to a key item of SWB measures covered in Chapter Three (Diener 1985: Argyle 2001), ‘satisfaction-with-life’, a cognitive self- evaluation of how well life is going (measured on a 0-10 Likert scale). This life-satisfaction analysis is presumed to encompass a broad range of wellbeing domains, one respondent stating ‘happiness to me means being content with who you are and where you are in life’ (ID151 F49).

This idea of contentment also aligns with Walker & Kavedžija’s suggestion that regardless of the differences between cultural accounts of happiness, one continuity is its ‘role as what we might term a diagnostic of life’ (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:1), an evaluation of ‘that multiplicity of aims, desires, or experiences that may comprise one’s conception of a full, good or meaningful life’ (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:17). In the accounts, versions of contentment can sound like personal formulas of a good life. For one respondent, contentment means ‘good health and free from worry and among those one loves’ (ID129 M74) and this echoes the ONS’s (2019) claim that the two most significant factors of personal happiness in the UK are relationships and health.

Grounding contentment across different domains seems to validate some of the assumptions behind the SWB measure (Pavot & Diener 2013) that a satisfaction/contentment evaluation constitutes an analysis encompassing multiple factors. This also aligns with needs theories focusing

on wellbeing satisficers explored in Chapter Two (e.g. Dean 2009). For another respondent, contentment echoes the eudemonic tradition (Vitterso 2016) in its association with right or proper conduct with regards how others are treated:

‘I am happy when I am content with life. And this in turn is when I am doing what I think I ought to do and/or relating to people - especially the people I am close to - as I ought to relate to them’ (ID21 M84)

While large-scale happiness research has tended to produce ‘thin-sliced data’ (Thin 2012:324), their underlying ontological assumption about the nature of happiness as a composite of ‘head and heart’ (Thin 2014), positive emotions and cognitive contentment, are supported by some respondents. ‘Happiness for me’ writes one, ‘is when you are at your most content and at the highest moment in your emotional life’ (ID37 F31) while another respondent describes happiness as ranging from ‘quiet contentment to extreme joy’ (ID188 F).

But others reject this idea. One dislikes the way ‘happy is used as a lazy synonym for contented or pleased’ (ID137 M80). For others, the difference is temporal; happiness ‘is a temporary state of physical and psychological wellbeing not to be confused with contentment a longer- term proposition’ (ID97 F77). Intensity as well as length is the issue for one respondent for whom happiness is ‘something extra, more transitory, and maybe a degree or two below ecstasy’ (ID84 M69). Also, the concept of contentment explored thus is its reactive property, a by-product or evaluation of something else. But what makes these accounts interesting is the way in which contentment is also recapitulated as a practice, an attitude or deliberate stance. As one respondent states:

‘it’s essential for an individual to have a certain level of realistic contentment with life- a proper appreciation of having say 3 good meals each day and a warm bed, for example’ (ID50 M73)

On one level, this links contentment to a normative “good life” judgement concerning what one ought to be content with. On another level, this form of contentment reflects an attitude or effort of active appreciation of the good things in one’s life, as one respondent puts it, of being able ‘to recognise and appreciate the good things in life when they occur’ (ID182 F51). Contentment is being presented here as an idea or guiding value (Engelke 2015). It is about practicing, not just experiencing contentment. The latter is portrayed by one respondent as a more passive, “entitled” form:

‘I think people put a lot of stock in happiness and also tend to expect things or other people to make them happy. I think it is more important to be happy in oneself, to find happiness in the everyday and make the most of what you've got’ (ID115 F31)

In this proactive sense, contentment, like eudemonia, represents a ‘way of life’ rather than a ‘response to life’ (Telfer 1980:10). It creates what Thin (2012) terms a ‘prudential narrative’ about how, as one respondent puts it, ‘contentment is a great thing to look for and to aim at’ (ID113 M26). Additionally, referring back to the last section about social pressure, contentment in this dimension is also offered as a corrective to unrealistic messages about being constantly happy.

‘I get momentary happiness in my life, and I'm just starting to feel ok with that. Now I've realised that happiness is fleeting I think I'll be a lot more content, because I won't always feel inadequate because I'm not constantly happy’ (ID29 F33)

Contentment connects here to an informal, empiricist outlook where the possibilities of happiness are delimited by what is “authentic” or “real”. In addition, if it is the case in rich, western nations that personal responsibility for happiness as ‘something potentially within the grasp of each individual and attainable largely through his or her own actions...a highly culturally specific idea that only came into being as late as the eighteenth-century Enlightenment’ (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:8), when refracted through the idea of contentment this happiness becomes attainable through ‘negative capability’ (Burkeman 2012), understanding what is not possible, rather than attaining anything we desire. This circumspect, modest and moderate version of happiness is perhaps refreshingly humble, deflating the grandiosity of Western individualism. On the other hand, is this idea of happiness the best kind of life we can aspire to?

As explored in Chapter Two, Baggin (2008) identifies two schools of happiness: System A (convenience) and System B (discovery). Happiness as contentment seems to align with System A (indeed, it is the system Baggin believes most people, and not just in the UK, tend to live by, whatever they may say or believe). In this category, ‘aspirations would be modest and the best life would be comfortable’ (Baggin 2008:7). People would seek enough money to achieve a certain amount of social status and material comfort but would then seek quiet fulfilment in their private lives, ‘finding their niche and staying in it...being satisfied with the familiar...seeking convenience over quality, distinctiveness, originality, excitement, adventure’ (Baggin 2008:97&98). Though this sounds rather dull and unambitious, as Baggin (2008:96) reflects, ‘who can blame them? Given how tough life can be, preserving modest contentment may be something of an achievement’. In addition, as will be seen in Chapters Five and Six (echoing Skey’s (2011) and Cieslik’s (2014) accounts

of everyday existence), 'almost all lives look bland from a distance, it is only in close-up that you get to see their richness and distinctness' (Baggini 2008:96).

Eudemonic vs Utilitarian Happiness

For evidence of Baggini's "System B" of the good life, 'something a little different...expanding one's horizons' (Baggini 2008:97) then the eudemonic philosophy of happiness seems best placed to understand this desire for 'development and discovery' (Baggini 2008:112). As explored in Chapter Two, eudemonic happiness is grounded in ongoing activities and judgements related to themes of meaning and purpose (Cieslik 2014) and many respondents descriptions of happiness reflect these principles. Take this respondent's exploration of what they consider to be key values of happiness, positioned in opposition to a powerful "consumerist" cultural discourse:

'Two of the most awful words that are combined are "consumer society". Consumption, a passive activity that so many claim to enjoy is hollow and flat- we are made to create. It is a wonderful thing to discover and appreciate your own and other people's creativity' (ID42 M47)

This comment is not just critique. It is also a positive statement about the teleological nature of human endeavour, that 'we are made to create'. In Chapter Six, I explore in more depth the way this intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci 2000; Ryff 2006) to develop mastery and achieve things is grounded in a variety of creative, work and leisure pursuits. The key point here is to emphasise how the eudemonic "happy life" is 'a way of life' (Telfer 1980:1), a deliberate practice based on what is meaningful and rewarding, pursued for its own sake and not for what we may or not feel. As the following response shows, this indicates a willingness to confront difficult and challenging experiences (Seligman 2011):

'2013 was the hardest year of my life; juggling a stressful job, an intensive Masters degree and a long distance relationship left no time for myself. I couldn't pursue any hobbies, I couldn't paint my nails, I couldn't watch chick flicks. I was not a happy bunny last year but it was necessary and I knew it was for the greater good. so sometimes being unhappy is necessary. I really wasn't happy last year and it took every ounce of strength I had to keep going, but it was something I knew I had to do' (ID122 F28)

Some people need more than contentment, a good life requires something more challenging, pursuing goals that take their lives out of their comfort zones. For this respondent, 'sometimes being unhappy is unnecessary' because, as Baggini (2008:39) suggests, 'happiness is not everything'. On the face of it this would imply that happiness is not as significant for everyday actors as most

contemporary debates assume; however, it does rather depend on how happiness is viewed; if it merely means feeling good, this may be insufficient. But in eudemonic concepts, sacrifices which ID122 calls 'necessary' and for the 'greater good' serve a more rounded, if more demanding idea of happiness where individuals are motivated by, as ID122 terms it, 'something I knew I had to do'. In eudemonic theory, 'people tend to have a sense of "leading a life", a sense of movement combined with trying to control and guide it in a way that makes sense and is valued by them' (Sayer 2011:116).

These themes of hard work, commitment and sacrifice are precisely the kind of virtues that Furedi (2004:31) believes are to found wanting among modern (particularly younger) individuals, due to their being frequently represented as antithetical to the quest of happiness. But this is challenged in these accounts. One younger respondent writes about how happiness is something that can involve difficulty and stress:

'Working towards my goal makes me happy too. I feel good when everything is organized so I can get things done, I have a really busy life with my family life, MA and. volunteer work and sometimes trying to juggle these things can get stressful' (ID169 F32)

Human flourishing is risky- undertaking challenges presuppose possibilities of failure and hardship and can lead to 'discomfort, inconvenience and unfamiliarity' (Baggini 2008:112). But this is the necessary price of the eudemonic "good life". One respondent who is training to be a Psychologist (who earlier described 2013 'as the most stressful of my life' because of the demands of her studies) illustrates how younger individuals can arrive at much richer and thicker concepts than is sometimes portrayed (Cieslik 2014):

'My line of work is stressful and likely to throw me in front of some of the worst of humanity like crime, abuse and trauma. So completing my masters doesn't mean I'm going to be happy in the future, it means I'm (hopefully!) going to be able to develop my career in a way that I find meaningful and satisfying...I strongly doubt that it will make me happy, but I strongly believe that it will help me satisfied, fulfilled and challenged in my future career. But perhaps these are one and the same? I suppose happiness doesn't always have to mean hedonistic happiness' (ID122 F28)

This respondent captures something about the 'riddle of happiness' (Cieslik 2014). 'Many of us would choose more education and a wider experience...even if we could see that it was unlikely to make us happier' (Baggini 2008:39). But as she reflects, being 'fulfilled and challenged' is a different kind of happiness. In grappling with the concept, she moves from understanding happiness as

hedonistic to viewing happiness as something more complex, underlining previous points that happiness critiques can be concerned with refuting particular versions, not the concept *per se*.

But to live more fully is not to live perfectly. Although the Aristotelean virtue of any human practice is in the excellence of its functioning, 'it is easy to miss the target' (Aristotle 2004:41) and the effort and learning takes place along the way can be as important as the accomplishment itself; the achievement is as much about the process than any aesthetic standard. It is about working at things. As one respondent states:

'I think you're happier if you've put some effort into something...if you try to do something and you work and you learn' (ID48 F32)

Implicitly, ideas about happiness 'always stands in a particular relationship to virtue' (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:17). But eudemonic happiness has a particularly explicit moral component (Blackburn 2001) about treating people in the 'right way' (Vitterso 2016). One respondent writes that 'I am just trying to live in the best way that I can and to do no harm' (ID87 F31). In the previous section, another respondent linked the idea of being content with moral virtue. Here, he develops this idea:

'I am happy when I am content with life. And this in turn is when I am doing what I think I ought to do and/or relating to people - especially the people I am close to - as I ought to relate to them. This is not really a matter of feelings or emotions - though it is of course nice when being content also brings a feeling of happiness. But doing the right thing and being the right person are quite often difficult and can in a variety of ways be painful. One is yet content because of the rightness of things' (ID21 M84)

So although doing the right thing could be construed as sacrificing pleasure and satisfaction, a richer depiction of pleasure and contentment is one bound up with these more virtuous pursuits (in terms of what we are pleased or content *about*). Often presented in binary terms, self-interest and altruism co-mingle as research about giving and happiness has shown (Layard 2011). This is something one respondent reflects on regarding her role as a foster parent:

'It sounds very "Goody Two Shoes" to say what make me happiest is trying to be kind and understanding and to help other people, but I think it really is the truth...a few years ago I read a book called " Good to a Fault" by Marina Endicott which gave me real food for thought. I examined my many years as a foster parent as I was aware than when anyone says how wonderful we were to do that I always say but it was because I wanted to and any positive outcomes were of course a bonus' (ID110 F67)

But this connection between pleasure and virtue is not the same as Layard's (2011) Utilitarian prescription that we should be virtuous because it leads to pleasure. Pleasure here is a bonus but not the aim. Social engagement and socially conscious action, in Aristotelean terms, are not means to an end but something intrinsic to the good or happy life, something Sayer (2011:15) calls 'enlightened self-interest'. At an interpersonal level, this social aspect also reveals a more collaborative dimension to happiness. For example, one older respondent defines happiness as a joint enterprise over the life-course: 'the wife and I have always worked together. THIS IS HAPPINESS' (ID177 M92).

But while relationships are a key contributor of flourishing then they are also capable of causing the most suffering. One respondent asserts that 'to have love and happiness you need to give it without expectation of receiving it back unconditionally, freely and in abundance' (ID184 F72). But this creates vulnerability, as another respondent describes:

'my family can make me happy because they know me the best (but that means they can also hurt me the most too)' (ID26 F54)

This encapsulates the predicament of the human actor in eudemonic interpretation. Happiness is a processual phenomenon because we have to make ongoing choices and decisions based on what is more or less conducive to flourishing but we do so in uncertainty, 'having no assurance, suspended between things as they are and the ways they might be' (Sayer 2011:4), if we will fare well or how others may treat us. In this ongoing struggle to flourish, the eudemonic actor is an essentially fallible and vulnerable one, faced with difficult challenges they have to negotiate (Cieslik 2017), what one respondent terms 'wrestling with the awkward complexities of living' (ID31 M42). In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle is clear that the practical requirement to make decisions and choices cannot rely on any clear blueprint or fool-proof strategy. This is summarised poignantly by ID122, who earlier described her struggle with juggling her studies with other areas of her life:

'Happiness is a tricky concept. It's something I've pondered over since I was a child. I used to think that if you understood enough about people, you could write a set of rules that would mean that you led the perfect life and would therefore be happy. But as I got older I realised that life was not that simple. Even if you wrote such a rulebook, and followed them, there is no guarantee that it would make you happy' (ID122 F28)

Eudemonic happiness is a life's work. It is grounded in practice and the choices, decisions and dilemmas humans face across the life-course. One middle-aged respondent encapsulates the various

subjective and objective factors, the balance of pleasure and pains, the bit of good fortune and the broader temporal perspective that go messily into the concept of a eudemonic “happy” life.

‘I think that I am, in general, a happy person, and that I've been happy all of my life. Which isn't to say that I haven't been upset, depressed, worried about work or relationships, sick or frustrated from time to time; far from it. But I remain fundamentally happy: the world around me stimulates my interest, if not always my approval...I have a wonderful wife who I love dearly; I know people, and have friends, who are interesting, good-hearted, intelligent and supportive; I enjoy generally good health; I have more than enough money to meet my modest needs; I'm curious about the world, and I can gratify my curiosity in various ways’
(ID107 M55)

In contrast, the Utilitarian tradition conceptualises happiness as a subjective, internal and emotional quantity that actors attempt to increase throughout their lives (McMahon 2013). As previously explored in this chapter, many respondents do associate a range of emotions with happiness, from fleeting moments to longer-term contentment. But the concept of utilitarianism is more demanding, expanding hedonic happiness into a moral philosophy; the good or happy life is whatever produces the greatest amount of pleasure and the least amount of pain (Warnock 2003).

In utilitarian theory, the individual as a rational actor, calculating what is likely to generate pleasure and avoid pain (Blackburn 2001). This individual is subject, in Bentham’s vivid expression, to ‘the governance of two sovereign masters, pleasure and pain...it is for them alone to determine what we ought to do...the standard of right or wrong are fastened to their throne (Bentham 1996:11)’. There are respondents who do perceive happiness in this way, as the following two excerpts show:

‘I would go so far as to say that happiness is an important driver for me - things that don't make me happy I tend to avoid, stop doing, or combine with something more enjoyable’
(ID61 F47)

‘in the last few years I have gradually come to a realisation that making sure I'm happy is important - and so now I try to ensure that if there are things I am doing which don't make me happy, I don't feel obliged to do so’ (ID200 M28)

But overall, it is a minority who view happiness in utilitarian terms. To be sure, many respondents define and describe happiness in affective, hedonic terms, but rarely did respondents position positive affect on top of a hierarchy of goods to be aimed at, as a deliberate strategy or pursuit. As has been explored at various points in this chapter, the seductive idea of future happiness is one many respondents critique, with many sceptical about the direct pursuit of hedonic satisfactions.

This is not say that, in reference to eudemonia, they don't see aspects of their lives in teleological terms, that is, a narrative or pursuit of ongoing accomplishment – however the idea of aiming for happiness itself, central to utilitarian thinking, appears quite alienating. Two responses to Q5 about imagining a 'happiest day' illustrate this.

'I don't look forward to my happiest day because it is the unknown and the marvels that surround this' (ID52 F67)

'I cannot answer this as I do not know the answer. That is why I enjoy the happiness that arrives when it appears' (ID4 M51)

This reluctance to engage in "abstract" speculation could be presented as further evidence of a rather unimaginative 'English' empiricism when it comes to happiness. But if it were indeed the case that individuals were rational pleasure-maximisers motivated to accumulate hedonic satisfactions, it would seem logical to suppose that future happiness, its qualities and locations, its relational, career or monetary aspects, would not lie outside the boundaries of imagining and speculation. Indeed, it would arguably form a central position within it. But this is rarely the case.

Epicureanism

Instead of happiness being interpreted as a positive evaluation or attitude, people also define happiness negatively as 'the absence of depression, anxiety and other negative emotions' (Argyle 2001:2). As explored in Chapter Two, this is linked to the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus, seen as the 'father' of the hedonic happiness tradition (McMahon 2006), who understood happiness as the absence of pain and mental disturbance, a state termed 'ataraxia' (Epicurus 2013). This definition of happiness as freedom from mental and anguish is echoed in the following excerpts:

'happiness means you are carefree, relaxed and at peace' (ID148 M71)

'For me to be happy is to be in a state of no anxiety or worry' (ID194 M72)

The Roman poet and Epicurean Horace (1997:211) famously prescribed: Carpe diem! (seize the day!). But not by the scruff of its neck. Epicurean hedonics advocates the simple life, the appreciative taking of pleasure from everyday activities and shared experiences, appreciating what one has and avoiding excess. This prudential pleasure-taking, defined by Epicurus' (2013:183) maxim whereby 'nothing is sufficient for the person who finds sufficiency too little', is reflected in the following response:

‘I like the simple things in life and I do not desire luxury. My greatest extravagance is a dozen or so trips to the theatre per year but they don't cost a fortune and if I couldn't afford to go, then I wouldn't. I could probably add to this list many more simple things’ (ID49 F62)

The aim of epicurean hedonics is either ‘tranquillity’ or serenity’ (Klein 2012; Gottlieb 2016). This mindset could be achieved by, among other things, embracing mortality, not hankering after worldly goods and through the deliberate practice of appreciation: ‘not what we have, but what we enjoy, constitutes our abundance’ (Epicurus 2013:159). This idea is frequently expressed and links to ideas about cultivating contentment explored previously:

‘I think people put a lot of stock in happiness and also tend to expect things or other people to make them happy. I think it is more important to be happy in oneself, to find happiness in the everyday and make the most of what you've got’ (ID115 F31)

‘I try and enjoy every day and cherish the small things in life...I am not seeking happiness, I want to enjoy being alive without the pressure of trying to be happy. I feel that I am content with my life and I am very grateful for the family, home, health that I have’ (ID87 F31)

At one level, these comments seem banal in their embrace of maxims like ‘enjoy every day’ and ‘be happy in oneself’. But these everyday expressions can signify huge richness, the ‘values people hold dear’ (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:1) and what matters most (Thin 2012; Cieslik 2014). ‘To be happy in oneself’ implies personal autonomy and responsibility for happiness, but if this seems a straightforward espousal of a key motif in Western societies of individual happiness ‘suitable for (and potentially available to) everyone’ (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:8) then it is also an implicit rejection of this idea because of this respondent’s scepticism of people ‘who put a lot of stock in happiness’. This sentiment is echoed by ID87’s wish to ‘cherish the small things’. But the banality of this statement prefaces a more profound declaration: not to seek happiness and to live without the pressure to be happy. To appreciate what one “has” - other people, health - is also evidence of the informal empiricism preferred by many respondents through focusing on the concrete domains and facts of one’s life. “Counting one’s blessings” is another proverbial way of expressing this modest kind of happiness:

‘Counting my blessings. Everyday that I go to work I meet people who face terrible hardships, either temporarily as a result of illness, or had a horrible life through little or no fault of their own. I have a roof over my head, a nice house, enough food to eat, a loyal and loving husband, two lovely children, a job etc. Many of the people I meet don't have this and I feel lucky. I also know it's all relative - I don't go around feeling guilty for feeling miserable

if it's a bad day because we're all entitled to feel like that sometimes. But overall, my life is good and I'm grateful' (ID178 F40)

The 'negative' happiness preached by Epicurus as ataraxia is also the exhortation to focus on the present: 'without both physical pain and mental disturbances in the forms of fears, frustrations and anxieties, a person may be able to participate fully in simply "being"...can achieve that summit of human experience sometimes known as "being here now"' (Klein (2012:X). This emphasis on "being here now" and "living in the moment" do appear an important focus for some respondents:

'I think that total happiness would mean a sense of living completely in the present moment and letting go of worries and preoccupations' (ID15 F69)

'I have discovered that happiness is the art of enjoying the moment and living in the moment' (ID159 M59)

The exhortation to live in 'the present' can also be linked to sceptical views exhibited by respondents in relation to ideas of reliving or imagining a happiest day. Since we can neither return to the past nor guarantee the future, a prudential attitude could be to take each day as it comes and not expend too much energy on objects outside of individual control. This is something three respondents reflect on:

'do not waste your life trying to recapture the past or imagine the future – live in the moment' (ID159 M59)

'I believe we should "take each day as it comes" and enjoy it as much as we can' (ID172 F65)

'I feel no urge to look for happiness or recapture some lost golden age because neither exist; they never did. Instead I prefer to relish, whenever I can, the rare occasions when it is possible to find the glowing spark of contentment in the sometimes scary and always surprising miracle of simply being alive' (ID31 M42)

In this last excerpt, the richness of the everyday is illustrated in the possibilities of contentment as 'a glowing spark' and a 'surprising miracle' (a more moderate appreciation of happiness needn't be mediocre). ID31's comment also illustrates an empiricist inclination towards the "real" in a temporal sense; ideas of both a more perfect past and future are myths: 'neither exist'. For other respondents, a focus on a happier future or self implies dissatisfaction with and distraction from present conditions:

'I spend so much time thinking about how I should be a happier person that I forget to enjoy the moments that make me happy' (ID87 F31)

'I am not sure I like the idea of a 'happiest day'; it feels like it has a pressure for perfection attached to it. I'd rather savour moments as they come along rather than building up expectations about a particular event' (ID161 F45)

ID161's desire to 'savour moments' has a particularly Epicurean flavour. Epicurus' (2013) writing is full of the benefits of slowing down and being aware of the deeper possibilities of things we often take for granted. In addition, a focus on the present moment also echoes Engelke's (2015) research about the happiness of British Humanists. There is a link between secular humanism- its rejection of religious doctrine and focus on the present moment as 'this is all there is' (Engelke 2015)- and Epicurus, who was derisive about the idea of an afterlife and a divine creator. Certainly, the 'miracle' ID31 speaks of above is of the earthly kind.

However, this temporal orientation towards the present can have a slightly more 'spiritual' connotation in the way Epicurean scholars perceive an intellectual co-habitation with Buddhism (Klein 2012; O'Keefe 2014). This can be adduced by the popular contemporary practice of mindfulness meditation, a secularised discipline derived from Buddhism. For one respondent, 'being in the moment' is assisted by mindfulness practice.

'I think being in the moment helps you to be happy and I think my meditation is helping me to do that...you have to keep being mindful as well' (ID117 F35)

Several respondents mention the benefits of mindfulness. This provides evidence of what Matthews (2012) terms the 'global cultural supermarket', how individuals are able to make lifestyle and value choices from a wider menu of cultural options. A further connection between Epicureanism and Buddhism is about non-attachment to possessions and disengagement from civic and political life (O'Keefe 2014). Epicureanism can therefore be critiqued as a somewhat trepidatious stance (McMahon 2006). This sets it apart from another key philosophy with which it otherwise shares many similarities in relation to 'what not to care about' (Gottlieb 2016:295), Stoicism, which advises individuals not to avoid disturbances but to face them with courage.

Stoicism

Stoic philosophy offers a bracing corrective to hubristic or self-aggrandising human strategies: we are insignificant (Sellars 2006). Also, in opposition to Aristotle, life is a-teleological. There is no meaning or purpose to find: One respondent echoes these ideas when reflecting on what happiness means:

'We are little specks of matter on a large planet, and things just happen, good and bad' (ID53 F66)

If Epicureanism teaches serenity, Stoicism stresses equanimity (McMahon 2006). As explored Chapter Two, in Stoic formulations, human conditions are ephemeral. Life could seem unrelentingly bad or spotlessly good but neither states are permanent (Seneca 2004). Equanimity arises from not attaching too much significance to these ups and downs, or in investing too much hope in what may or may not arrive (Sellars 2006). Views about happiness are frequently understood in this vein:

‘Life being life more or less everything goes wrong sooner or later. The man who accepts this may be just as stressed as his neighbour, but at least he doesn't have as far to fall’ (ID31 M42)

‘if you come to expect certain things you'll be disappointed when they don't happen’ (ID14 F21)

‘I don't like to look ahead and build up events to be potentially 'happiest days', as I believe that will almost always lead to disappointment when events do not turn out as people imagine’ (ID89 M45)

In many ways, these sentiments echo recurring themes in this chapter concerning lowering expectations and the myths of the ‘future perfect’. The specific stoic prescription to deal with insecurity and uncertainty is to be curious about it: actively consider the possibility of disaster and misfortune to show how these events may not be quite as catastrophic as feared (Sellars 2006). In this way, individuals confront hardships embodying the key classical virtue of fortitude (Seneca 2004), what in modern parlance might be termed ‘resilience’ (Young Foundation 2010). Themes of resilience underpin the following responses while also echoing themes explored in this chapter about “holistic” happiness involving a balance of positive and negative experience (Cieslik 2014) as well as the eudemonic acceptance of the possibility of hardship:

‘that's how I've dealt with things that have been utterly miserable and distressing. Life goes on around you. It's fine to feel down and to have a cry but bills still need paying and the children need feeding so I get on with it. Other people say they couldn't cope with some of the things I've had to deal with, but I couldn't not cope or everything would fall apart’ (ID178 F40)

‘I feel that life is full of its ups and downs and I have had times of great sadness but I manage to pull through those sad times’ (ID169 F32)

Stoicism varies in its positions, but one common characteristic is its emphasis of the limits of individual control (Gottlieb 2016). Therefore, another aspect of respondents’ reluctance to engage with ideas about reliving past days or imaging future ones is because these temporal spaces are

outside the locus of control. Epicureanism prescribes the simple life as a response, to appreciate the here and now. But this means some form of engagement with the world whereas the Stoic consolation is to draw on inner resources: the one thing we do have control over is our own moral responsibility (Sellars 2006). A dignified life is possible by maintaining our virtue through both the successes and reversals portrayed by many respondents as “normal” characteristics of living. For stoicism, a happy life is a dignified life; however bad the situation a person can retain the capacity to act virtuously, as these responses show in their assertions of internal strength:

‘do as you would be done by, keep smiling and soldier on!’ (ID28 F61)

‘there are so many reasons to be unhappy at times. The secret is to carry on, be as busy as you can and try and help someone in someway every day’ (ID85 F71)

‘Happiness comes from inside and no one can take that away from me even when things are really hard’ (ID117 F35)

Of further significance here is that, unlike eudemonic (though Aristotle is referred to), utilitarian and epicurean philosophies which respondents echo but do not explicitly reference, stoicism is the philosophy that is explicitly referred to and avowed. Here are two examples of this, which also demonstrate an engagement with ‘public repertoires’ (Savage 2007) and cultural resources of happiness:

‘a few months ago I read a book called something like, "The Antidote to Happiness". It explained how motivational books and workshops don't necessarily bring people happiness because they make people set goals that are unachievable. The book devoted a chapter to Stoicism, and some of that made sense to me. It's not about being strangely optimistic and positive about bad things that happen, it's more about accepting that it's happening and getting on with it more’ (ID178 F40)

‘I expect that each day will bring pleasures as well as the requirement to be stoical’ (ID50 M73)

The notion of the stoic “stiff upper lip” is the kind of cultural cliché about Britishness/ Englishness that scholars are often keen to problematise or label as ‘myth’ (Kearney 2003; Cohen 2000). However, the attraction of Stoicism to the MO respondents seems clear taking into account the recurring themes of moderation and empiricism highlighted in this chapter. Moderation in the stoic sense is to accept the insignificance of human endeavour as well as the instability of both good and bad outcomes and consequentially to moderate or downplay the significance of either. With regards empiricism, Stoicism insists on facing the ‘real’ even if that reality is distressing.

Classicist Edith Hall (2018) has critiqued Stoicism for its ontological depiction of an isolated, under-socialised individual battling life's difficulties alone. This sets Stoicism apart from the more socially situated and implicated eudemonic self. In labelling stoicism as overly individualistic, Hall also notes the association of Stoicism with contemporary self-help movements and this appears to align with Furedi's (2004) depiction of obsessive self-management strategies of modern life. However, the themes of resilience, discipline and moral virtue exhibited by respondents in this and previous sections feel a world away from frivolous, narcissistic culture that haunt Furedi's critique.

Summary

This chapter has explored key themes in the way respondents think about and critically reflect on the meaning of happiness. In relation to my first research question, how do subjective accounts of happiness reflect different philosophies of happiness, in particular the contrast between utilitarian and eudemonic concepts? In the main, respondents are sceptical about happiness understood as 'feeling good' or in a pursuit of a greater ratio of positive over negative affect. While demonstrating a preference for the eudemonic interpretation, in many ways, the responses spill over the confines of this well-worn debate. The happiness embraced by many respondents speak to broadly 'classical' themes, within which eudemonia plays an important role alongside Stoic and Epicurean ideas. These are: the limits of personal autonomy, the cultivation of moderate expectations, treating others well, disdaining materialism and acknowledging the co-existence of positive and negative experiences. Contemporary happiness tropes such as a temporal orientation towards the present, a focus on personal contentment and a belief in an autonomous and unique 'individual' are apparent but are also problematic, often drawing on classical virtues for their expression.

In understanding the 'folk philosophy' (Baggini 2008) of lay accounts, the preference throughout this chapter has been to filter ideas of happiness through an informal 'empiricist' perspective, based on what is perceived to be 'realistic' in relation to human experience. One key consequence of this is to moderate expectations of the scope of happiness. At the same time, this focus on what is concrete, the present moment, one's immediate circumstances, does link to a sense that responsibility for happiness lies within the individual, but a responsibility partially defined by its limits. In its modesty this seems actually rather radical, positioned against what is largely seen as hegemonic in Western societies in much of the literature (Mathews 2012; Furedi 2004), the idealisation of an individual's pursuit of happiness. This many respondents evidently regard as rather self-defeating.

Collectively, these moderate ideas align with Baggini's (2008) 'System A' of happiness: cultivate contentment with what you have, find joy in the everyday and familiar. However, running alongside these themes is a more challenging eudemonic understanding of happiness, Baggini's System B,

pursuing meaningful projects which stretch capabilities and so also risk unhappiness, stress and failure. While Bagginis considers the two systems to be incompatible, it seems from the responses that most people can accommodate a bit of both (Walker & Kavedžija 2015).

Chapter 5: Interdependence and Relational Life

Much of the data analysed in this (and subsequent) chapter was written in response to Q2 of the directive that asked respondents to list ten or more things that make them happy. Because many respondents do not simply list these things but go on to explain and reflect on them, this rich data makes it possible to identify the ways in which positive happiness factors are evaluated in relation to degrees of quality or significance, what Thin (2012:322) terms 'experiential salience'. In relation to my second research question, the way sources of happiness are embedded in what respondents value can be better understood.

A major theme emerging from the accounts concerns the relational nature of happiness. This echoes key findings of a raft of UK and international large-scale happiness surveys that cite personal relationships as the key causal factor in a person's happiness (e.g. ONS 2019; UNSDN 2019). However, the advantage of interpretive data is the insight provided into why and in what ways the association between happiness and relationships is so strong (Cieslik 2017; Hyman 2014).

Intimate Relationships

The proportion of households in the UK headed by married couples has been decreasing in recent decades (ONS 2019). Yet since its inception in 2012, the UK national wellbeing index has consistently shown that marital status (being married or in a Civil Partnership) is one of three factors 'that have the strongest associations with how positively we rate our life satisfaction' (ONS 2019). Almost two thirds of respondents who provided data about marital status were married or in Civil Partnerships¹⁰ and 85% of respondents living in family households were married, a higher proportion than the UK as a whole (ONS 2019)¹¹.

A loving, long-term, mutually supportive relationship with a partner emerged as one significant factor of personal happiness in these accounts, for both men and women and across different age groups. Very few respondents explicitly referred to the institution of marriage itself as being the causal factor of relational happiness¹². What mattered more than the relationship structure were the

¹⁰ The accounts were written in 2013/14, when marriage was still illegal for gay couples; 3 of the 5 who self-identified as living as same sex-couples were in civil partnerships

¹¹ This probably reflects the older demographic of the cohort; none of the fifteen respondents under 30 years old were married.

¹² The fact that no respondent, married or otherwise, made a normative argument about the institution of marriage or discuss marriage in terms of its being a normal or natural state of affairs that generally people 'ought' to conform to may reflect a wider liberalising trend where attitudes towards cohabitation, same-sex relationships and non-married couples with dependent children have become more tolerant in the UK, particularly in the last decade (BSAS 2019).

qualities and associated benefits of these relationships. Indicative of many responses emphasising the significance of loving relationships is ID5, a 39 years old female 'homemaker':

'M is the secret to happiness in my life, healing, patient and loving man. happiness to me is being safe and loved, cared for and respected. he makes me feel safe' (ID5 F39)

Key characteristics of love presented here, a 'loving' partner, and 'being 'loved' echoes Hyman's (2014) research where her interviewees emphasise the importance of 'being in love', either in experienced or imaginary terms. The significance of love is commented on by many respondents, for example 'feeling loved and appreciated' (ID75 F79) and 'someone saying they love me' (ID91 F63). For Smart (2007:59), love is an 'ordinary' part of personal life and Sociology should 'take love seriously' if it hopes to capture what matters to people. However, as she points out, 'if sociology has been cool towards emotions in general, then its approach to love can only be described as frosty'. Part of the reason for this is the way notions of "falling" or "being" in love are seen to reinforce unrealistic cultural expectations of individual self-fulfilment. In respect to Hochschild's (2003 in Cieslik 2014:425) concept of the "'feeling rules" that govern modern life', romantic love is idealised as an antidote to the insecurities of isolated selfhood experienced in Western societies (Bauman 2001).

The high expectations of love and its significance for personal fulfilment are certainly reflected in these accounts, illustrated by ID5's comment above about her partner being 'the secret to happiness in my life'. Respondents also described their partner as being a key component of one's destiny and purpose in life, someone who they were "meant" to discover and live alongside. This can be seen in the way one male respondent writes about his wife, declaring 'I believe she was created for me and I think about her all the time. I had to wait a long time to find her, but she is worth it' (ID23 M).

Relationships can express 'the idea that a life seems to be heading towards some pre-determined outcome...somehow "meant to be"' (Thin 2012:322). But this also implies the absence of personal autonomy; the object of happiness is "out there". For Ahmed (2010), this forms part of how individuals become dependent upon and manipulated by a "promise" of happiness- the idea that one has to attain happiness implies a lack and deficiency in one's existing self (Hyman 2014). One female respondent who has been married for 31 years describes her husband as 'the other half of me' (ID186 F56), suggesting that completeness or coherence of self is only secured by attachment to another and that something was previously "missing".

Other responses highlighted the elevated status of love as something above and beyond 'normal' happiness (Hyman 2014), composed of a 'higher' or 'sublime' quality (Haidt 2003; Cieslik 2017). As one respondent puts it, 'if you love someone and they also happen to love you, that's pure,

unadulterated happiness' (ID171 F65). Such elevated language reflects what Langford (1999:35 in Hyman 2011:202) critiques as the 'religion of love'. Similarly, for Ahmed (2010:55), happiness as 'romance-quest' is a particularly powerful 'happiness script' that heightens personal expectations while producing conformity to socially approved goals.

However, as Smart (2000:74) emphasises, drawing on her empirical work of personal life, the experience of love is 'not transcendent of being experienced as a removal from the mundane or everyday into a special place'. This can be seen in the way respondents situate love within everyday activities like reading in bed; sitting in the garden going to favourite cafes and watching TV. The 'banality of these referents' (Skey 2011:49) may illustrate how these loving relationships contribute to 'ontological security' (Giddens 1991) where one 'can rely on things- people, objects, places, meanings- remaining tomorrow, by and large, as they were today and the day before' (Skey 2011:23). As ID5 emphasised above, happiness means being 'safe and loved' and the strong association between love and safety in these accounts also support Baggin's (2008) analysis that for many people happiness is grounded in comfort and consistency over discovery and novelty.

However, loving relationships are rarely narrated as unblemished. For example, ID186, quoted above describing her husband as 'the other half of me', goes on to state 'I'm not saying he doesn't have negative qualities too'. Echoing moderate perceptions of happiness explored in Chapter Four where respondents' scepticism about 'perfect' representations of happiness was frequently expressed, these respondents temper their expectations of what they can expect from relationships, revealing 'fairly conventional expectations as far as intimacy and relationships are concerned' (Smart 2007:26). For one, being 'happily married' presupposes a balance of positive and negative experiences (Cieslik 2014): 'I have been happily married for 47 years - of course we have had our ups and downs and disagreements' (ID39 F70).

As the last excerpt demonstrates, some responses provided a broader temporal perspective (Thin 2012), indicating how relationships unfold across the life-course. In the UK, although around 40% of marriages are now expected to end in divorce (ONS 2018), this likelihood decreases over time, so the percentage of marriages that end in divorce after 20 years are much lower than in the first 10 years (ONS 2018). Although some of the success factors of long-term relationships and age will be addressed in more detail in Chapter Nine, one factor is how expectations of relationships are moderated over time: 'love can be understated...as couples grow older this tends to be narrated in terms of shared histories or ventures' (Smart 2007:27). One of the oldest respondents, beginning his response to Q2 about what makes him happy, writes that 'top of the List must be...the wife and I have been married for 67 years. We have always worked together' (ID177 M92).

The idea of happiness involving 'work' reflects eudemonic themes of "working at something" and a more collaborative responsibility for creating happiness (Walker & Kavedžija 2015; Cieslik 2017). This emphasis problematises the "individualization" thesis of sociologists (Beck 1992; Howard ed 2003), particularly assumptions that, since choice trumps commitment, individuals flit in and out of relationships entered into 'for what can be derived for each person by a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far that it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it' (Giddens 1992:58 in Howard 2003:35).

These depictions of long-term relationships I coded as "continuous", that is, durable factors of happiness across the life-course. This chimes with research about 'adjusted preferences' discussed in the literature review (e.g. Layard 2011), where one explanation for why wealth and possessions do not, above a certain level, positively correlate with happiness is because the pleasures derived from these are short-lived. By contrast, continuous benefits are drawn from durable relationships such as loyalty and mutual support:

'am blessed with a very beautiful and capable partner, and we are fortunate in having a very good and happy relationship. Over the years we have had some tough times. In spite of these things, or because of them, we have grown closer and stronger in quietly supporting each other, raising our children and growing in love. It is these simple but profoundly important things that bring so much happiness into our lives: we know we have each others' unflinching support; unquestioning loyalty' (ID42 M47)

These 'simple but profoundly important things' ID42 describes are further indication of the richness and depth of experience embedded in the everyday (Cieslik 2017; Skey 2011). His comments about the 'unflinching support' and 'unquestioning loyalty' he and his partner 'know' they have from the other could also reflect an important dimension to flourishing whereby the satisfaction of various needs relies upon positive social reinforcement (Diener 1999). 'Individuals stand in need of the approval of others...psychologically dependent on them for their support, sociality and approval. The quality of relations to others is essential to well-being' (Sayer 2011:121) and satisfaction of these psychosocial 'esteem' needs connect to theories of wellbeing explored in Chapter Two (e.g. Ryan and Deci 2001).

As Honneth (1995 in Sayer 2011:121) has argued, 'recognition can be given only by another subject...recognition not only enables the development of the self but, in the form of respect, allows us to develop self-respect'. Although recognition and the means to self-respect can be realised in other contexts, for example employment or achievement in a particular field, personal relationships seem to provide a particularly important platform. These dependent aspects of recognition and

affirmation reflect Sayer's (2011) depiction of interdependent actors, capable of agency but also vulnerable to how they are being treated. One respondent's comparison of his current relationship with previous partners is telling in this respect:

'I have had some pretty poor relationships in the past with some real idiots who weren't very good for me...Current relationship is wonderful and my partner is supporting, interesting, funny and we have a great time together. I look forward to seeing him whenever he has been away and I am always happy to come home to him' (ID134 M36)

However, relational need doesn't require sacrificing independence because relationships can also foster personal autonomy and identity. As Sayer (2011:128) puts it, 'autonomy should be understood not as complete independence of others but as self-command and capacity for agency within the context of relationships and responsibilities that afford us some support'. This supportive context for autonomy is emphasised by ID134 (above), who details the support he gets from his partner. Another respondent values the 'space to be ourselves and be accepted for who we are' in relationships'. He continues: 'being loved and accepted just as you are is perhaps the single most important thing that brings me happiness' (ID42 M47).

As Sayer (2011:119) emphasises, our individuality is not a thing-like entity that can be recognised or rejected by others, relationships are also 'constitutive of the individual and their sense of self'. For Smart (2007:28) too, the development of autonomy presupposes a relational context: 'to live a personal life is to have agency and to make choices, but the personhood implicit in the concept requires the presence of others to respond to and to contextualise these actions and choices'. This also connects to Thin's (2012) conceptualisation of happiness as intersubjective and co-produced. Certainly, the significance of partners for self-fulfilment is brought into focus not just by the positive examples cited in this section but, on the flipside, through accounts of unhappiness explored in Chapter Seven.

Relationships can also be fun! An overly commitment or needs-based perspective makes 'relationships too negative- there is something positive and substantial to underpin it' (Smart 2007:45). Many respondents cited laughter as a source of happiness and one describes her husband making her laugh as one of the joys of the relationship. Laughter can also be associated with spontaneous playfulness. One female respondent takes delight in the times 'when my husband suddenly plays the fool' (ID15 F69). For MacIntyre (1999:85 in Sayer 2011:114), 'we are playful beings, not just in the childish sense but in the sense of finding change and experiment appealing'. Play can also develop and strengthen attachments and commitments to others (Sayer 2011).

'Nuclear' Family Life

Despite the decline in, and liberalisation of attitudes towards, traditional family households in the UK (BSAS 2018; ONS 2019), Smart's (2007:187) research on personal life 'emphasises just how deep-seated familial relationships can be for each new generation'. As Hockey and James (2003:172) point out, 'the "home" and "family" have combined together to lay the foundations of the domestic ideal so that, in contemporary industrial societies, they conceptually reinforce one another'. This 'domestic ideal' of the happy family has also served as a 'powerful legislative device' (Ahmed 2010) and is therefore not politically or socially neutral. Ahmed's critique of what she terms 'the promise of happiness' is that socially-desirable objectives like 'motherhood' and 'family' are simultaneously value-laden and self-effacing, 'directing you towards the good, while creating the impression that the good is what gives you direction' (Ahmed 2010:38).

Although it is important to recognise the powerfully subtle ways in which ideological norms frame subjective experiences and expectations of family, this does tend to obscure the ways agents themselves narrate and evaluate its significance. For, as Thin (2012:325) states, 'an adequate representation of society conveys some sense of how people experience life and find meaning in it'.

In the MO responses, 'family' was one of the most frequently cited and reflected on source of happiness and the intimate nuclear family unit, comprising partner/spouse and dependent child/children, played a central role:

'Thinking of my family, my husband and my children, and all the positive aspects they bring to my life makes me happy. Spending time with them and having them near me makes me feel good. Hearing them chat and laugh around and with me in a comfortable way brings a warm glow to my heart' (ID20 F40)

The statement 'spending time with them and having them near me' shows the importance of 'proximity to objects of happiness' (Ahmed 2010:51). Another respondent described happiness as 'relaxing with my partner or children; just being in their company and seeing them happy' (ID55 M48). Narratives about the nuclear family had a strong, domestic focus; the idea of home is 'more than the sum of its parts...tied to memory, to relationships and to events' (Smart 2007:163) but also to comfort and security. One respondent describes a variety of domestic routines and patterns of family life that have wider symbolic significance. One of these is signalled by the return of her husband from work, the sound of his van in the driveway and the children calling out 'Dad's home!' (ID44 F42). As Skey (2011:22) suggests, it is the 'spatial and temporal regularities' of ordinary life played out in familiar 'zones of operation' that engender a sense of comfort and security. These

routines become significant not just in the present tense of experience and the past tense of memory but also through the prospect of being repeated and relived in the future.

Aspects of UK culture may also contribute to the significance of the home and family. Fox (2004) interrogates the cultural cliché of ‘an Englishman’s home is his castle’ and finds much to recommend it. One key factor, Fox contends, is what she terms ‘English social dis-ease’, the awkwardness of social interaction, for which private family offers a kind of ‘natural remission’. In addition, Second, the home as ‘castle’ is simultaneously secure and defensive, defined as much by the threat of the ‘outside’ as what takes place within. Indeed, for some respondents, home became a place of “refuge” from the outside world where safety and comfort could be found. This appeared in two responses where the threatening ‘outside’ is represented by the weather:

‘curling up on the sofa as a family, doors closed, watching the snow/rain/ hail fall outside; knowing we’re all warm, dry and safe together’ (ID45 F)

‘All the ironing done, everyone fed, the kids have done all their homework, the pets have been locked away for the night, everyone’s safe indoors...the dark night’s been shut out and it feels safe and all those chores have been finished at last’ (ID178 F40)

One key theme that emerged in the accounts was a “personal happiness, social unhappiness” dichotomy whereby many respondents located positive sources of happiness in their personal and intimate life and unhappiness in broader ‘society’ and the outside world (Chapter Eight explores this in depth with regards political and social attitudes). In the excerpts above, bad weather constitutes the external threat that can be ‘shut out’ in ID178’s phrase, by securing the intimate space that ID45 calls ‘warm, dry and safe’.

In addition, as conveyed by ID178’s responsibility for household chores, depictions of family life also revealed quite conventional gender narratives (Smart 2007). This can also be seen when children are identified as a source of happiness. Though this was also a positive factor for male respondents, female respondents with younger children were the most effusive about the joys of parenting, reflected in the following quotes from three mothers:

‘my children make me happy. it’s overwhelming sometimes’ (ID65 F43)

‘Having children is just wonderful - a total cliché. I don’t know what happens but something does and you know they are snotty children to everyone else but they are just magical beings to me’ (ID109 F39)

‘arriving home each day on the school bus/ chatting to them all about their day/ the smell of their hair/ “them”’ (ID44 F42)

Ahmed (2010) critiques as ‘fantasies’ notions of the “happy housewife” and “happy mother”. She contends that patriarchal social norms are redefined as social goods and packaged as a promise of happiness. From this perspective, the elevated language used by these mothers, ‘overwhelming’, ‘magical’ and ‘wonderful’, say less about any intrinsic joys of parenting and more about the way individuals direct positive emotions towards socially approved identities and roles.

On the other hand, as can be seen in ID39’s self-aware comment about being ‘a total cliché’ as she calls motherhood ‘just wonderful’, alongside the irony and self-deprecation of juxtaposing ‘magical beings’ with ‘snotty children to everyone else’, there is a certain knowingness (Savage 2007) about how these comments might be perceived and judged by others. This also reflects what Fox (2004:23) terms ‘the all-pervasive ‘humour rules’ of English cultural discourse, particularly the use of irony to undercut earnestness and sentiment. In a similar vein, another female respondent cites her children as a source of happiness ‘when they are not being generally objectionable’. Yet these comments may also signify how parenting, like most sources of happiness explored in the accounts, is associated with both positive and negative qualities (Cieslik 2014). Furthermore, it is not always the case that female respondents associate having children with successful relational and family life. Indeed, one female respondent attributes her happiness and the success of her relationship to ‘the fact we have no children’ (ID128 F44).

Questions concerning the causal relationship of having children and happiness reflects a wider and contested debate in Happiness research. Data from the UK happiness index (ONS 2019) suggests that having dependent children is positively correlated with higher self-reported life satisfaction. However, Dolan (2014), using Kahneman’s (2006) “Day Reconstruction Method” to measure real-time affect (explored in Chapter Three), shows no association between bringing up children and increased positive emotions. For Dolan, as well as Ahmed (2010), the fact that people evaluate rather than experience their children as happiness factors reveals more about how subjects accommodate socially acceptable ‘happiness scripts’ in order to belong to a wider ‘affective community’ (Ahmed 2010) when making normative judgements about their lives.

One way of reframing this debate is through a eudemonic lens of happiness where the quantity of pleasure experienced is not the only motivation for why we do things; meaning and purpose are just as significant. Through the eudemonic lens, the significance of parenting may reflect the way self-identity is partly formed by the social roles we assume (MacIntyre 1981). Although cultural expectation regarding parenting and in particular motherhood can imply conformity and constraint

(Hockey & James 2003), in eudemonic terms, parenting, like other social practices, is understood as having certain intrinsic virtues and obligations, particularly around care and service, connected to the “telos” (purposive function) of parenting: to raise children who can subsequently flourish. Here, satisfaction derives not only from the practice of parenting but also from the pride and positive self-identification with “good” parenting. Here one parent reflects on this sense of achievement:

‘I can honestly say they are a complete joy to know. We genuinely enjoy being with them and taking an interest in their lives, equally giving them space to grow as people. That pays off. It gives me immense pleasure to see them perform and seeing their success at school. I know they are going to grow into very able and lovely adults. That gives me immense pride and happiness and I look forward to seeing them grow and mature’ (ID42 M47)

But while this last statement seems to indicate that even commitments to others can be redirected to augment a positive sense of self (Hyman 2014), the very nature of these social roles can sometimes mean that one’s own wellbeing can be overridden by the needs of others. That some practices ‘defy categorization as either self-interested or altruistic’ (Sayer 2011:123) is particularly associated with care relationships; parents can act ‘for self-and-other together’ (Held 2006 in Sayer 2011:123). Haidt (2012) has also written about the way care and concern for loved ones can transcend or become fused with our own wellbeing and this is illustrated in the way some respondents elide the happiness of partners and children with their own, one respondent declaring that ‘If they are happy that’s all I need’ (ID165 F43). One male respondent who earlier in this section described happiness as ‘being in the company of my wife and children’ also states that what makes him happy ‘is seeing them happy’ (ID55 M48). Similarly, for one respondent, knowing her ‘family are happy and doing well makes me feel content’ (ID169 F32). Another expresses concerns for his son’s health:

‘I feel happy and at one with the world when I know that my wife, son and daughter are themselves free from anxiety and concern. Happiness springs especially from knowing that my son is well’ (ID194 M72)

Returning to theories of happiness explored in Chapter Two, a utility-based ontology cannot capture this sense of service to another. In addition, if sociological concerns about the emergence of self-calculating individualism were correct (Skey 2011) and the world was ‘filled with self-actualizing persons pulling their own strings, capable of guiltlessly saying no to anyone about anything, and freely choosing when to begin and end all their relationships, it is hard to see how, in such a world, children could be raised, the sick or disturbed could be cared for’ (Sayer 2011:128).

Therefore, a more expansive understanding of the “happy individual” is one where happiness is fused with that of others so that it becomes ‘difficult to dissociate their feelings about themselves from their feelings about their loved ones and their fortunes’ (Sayer 2011:120). This can be further observed in some responses to Question Four of the directive about identifying a ‘happiest day’. While weddings, and graduations feature prominently, these are often not one’s own, focusing instead on children, grandchildren and other family members.

Although the way ‘our imaginations and our most intense cares as connected to the good of others...implies a fundamentally eudemonistic rather than egotistic orientation’ (Sayer 2004:8), concern for the happiness of others was often limited to the parochial social world of intimate relationships. One respondent was blunt about this: ‘within the small circle of people whom we like or love, the happiness of others generally pleases us; beyond that, to me at least, if insisted on too much, it becomes tedious and sometimes irritating’ (ID22 M46). Another respondent draws a boundary of concern around what she calls her ‘world’: ‘happiness, to me, means all being well with my world, my children are well, my husband is happy, we have no worries’ (ID114 F41).

Baggini (2008) suggests that one reason most people’s outlook on the happy life is not about discovery and change is because they are unwilling to uproot themselves from their intimate networks. Indeed, the protection of these can engender rather confrontational comments, with one respondent directing a warning to imagined others:

‘If someone does me, or my family, what I consider to be an injustice or harm, then I will be more than happy to see them “pay”’ (ID49 F62)

Just as, for Cohen (1985), the significance of community lies in its symbolic boundary — for “us” to exist there must also be a “them” — family can be defensively constructed against imagined and threatening outsiders. This reflects a broader theme emerging from these accounts where personal unhappiness is often located in wider society. As another respondent comments:

‘What I have learnt is that so much unhappiness comes from outside and in order to maintain a certain amount of happiness...We as a family unit need to block out all the negativity, this is harder than it sounds but at the moment we need to work towards’ (ID141 F33)

One sociological approach to life in western societies characterised by the fragmentation of traditional institutions, ideological certainties and work-based solidarity (Bauman 2001) is a broadly optimistic view of ‘reflexive modernity’ where individuals negotiate their meaning in life in circumstances of relative freedom and choice (Giddens 1991). A more pessimistic reading is where

these social conditions lead instead to atomised individuals experiencing chronic insecurity and anxiety, conditions not exactly conducive to generosity and openness towards others. For Baggini (2008:92), 'it's not that the English lack compassion, it's just that they are too busy watching their own backs'.

Childhood and Family Support

How important is childhood? 'Evidence shows that the best predictor of an adult's life satisfaction is their emotional health as a child' (Layard 2017:14) and as Chapter Seven will show, it is certainly a key theme of unhappiness in the longer-term. Positive formative experiences were also reflected upon. Part of their significance lies in the security that comes from feeling loved and protected, a recurring theme in this chapter. This can be seen in some responses to Q3 of the Directive soliciting a 'happiest day', as the following two excerpts demonstrate:

'If I had to choose a moment, it would probably be one where I was spending time with my grandparents who gave me all the love and attention in the world when I was little. I always felt safe and loved' (ID187 F63)

'We were living in an old-fashioned, small community where everyone knew one another and people had lived in the same area for generations. When we walked into the village, my mother would stop to speak to several other women, or would talk in shops to the owners or assistants and the female customers. My life at the time felt safe and cosy, and I knew that I was loved' (ID2 F57)

That these are recollections by two respondents in late middle age suggests how enduringly important childhood experiences can be. In ID2's recollections, safety and security are connected to a sense of togetherness and community, with caregiving not just rooted in the family but also a wider (mostly female) support structure. The 'old-fashioned, small community where everyone knew one another' also speaks to a traditional notion of community of convivial social relations often invoked as a way of contrasting past and present. Community scholars have suggested that this contrast leans heavily on nostalgia (Delanty 2003; Taylor 2011). Is the "happy childhood" subject to similar distortion?

As explored in Chapter Three, the imaginary realm of memory (Hockey & James 2003) is problematic for researchers; not only are individuals selective in their memories, what they remember may reflect their present sense of identity more than being an accurate guide to how life was experienced at the time (Hockey & James 2003). Skey's analysis (2011:23) of how UK residents construct personal identity illustrates a tendency to seek 'terra firma...stable footing' by pegging past

events as reference points on a symbolic map. In this way 'we know who we are by knowing who we were' (Skey 2011:24). Answering Q3, one respondent uses the 'safe' and 'innocent' time of childhood to underline the struggles, uncertainty and responsibilities of adult life:

'I would pick a time from my childhood, where all my family were together, probably on holiday, enjoying the innocence of childhood and not having any worries about what the future might hold. Life was much easier then, no bills to pay, no employment concerns, no taxes, I know that I'm lucky, as many children wouldn't have had as many holidays or happy memories' (ID120 M35)

However rose-tinted these memories are, they may also be reasonable in terms of what they are about (Sayer 2011), highlighting something important about the way roles and responsibilities change and multiply across the lifecourse, making wellbeing difficult to achieve (Cieslik 2017). In addition, his comment that he was 'lucky' to have a happy childhood also shows how elements of wellbeing are a matter of fortune: our development 'exists only in potentia; adverse circumstances can jeopardise every one of them' (Archer 2001:42). Therefore, as Aristotelians like Nussbaum (1999) and Sayer (2011) stress, happiness is dependent on favourable conditions: 'born into unchosen positions, relationships and environments' (Sayer 2011:128), humans 'need and seek attachment to a carer or carers, and the quality of that care is important not only for their physical health but their subsequent psychological wellbeing and emotional and intellectual development' (Sayer 2011:110). The significance of care and recognition in formative experience is also underlined by how a lack of these things stymies flourishing, as Chapter Seven will show.

At the same time there is nothing 'lucky' about ID120's childhood in the sense of luck (explored in Chapter Four) as caprice or cosmic design. This luck reflects social opportunities and how these are unequally distributed. As he says, 'other children wouldn't have had as many holidays' and to see how happiness operates in society as a whole is to see how wellbeing factors like childhood development are contingent upon socio-economic context and social class. Given the largely middle-class demographic of the participant panel, one aspect of a 'happy childhood' is the relative privilege of growing up in households with the spending power to afford holidays and this is highlighted by UK happiness data that consistently shows a positive association of life satisfaction with household income (ONS 2019). On the other hand, as Chapter Seven shows, relative privilege is no guarantor of a happy childhood.

If childhood is significant for happiness in adult life then this to some degree undermines individualistic and utilitarian concepts of happiness based on personal choice; Individuals are not 'floating agents' (Smart 2007:29) but encumbered by history, tradition, biography and relationships'

(Smart 2007:187). As Macintyre (1999:85) suggests, 'acknowledgement of dependence is the key to independence' in part because the way in which 'individuals are constituted through their close kin ties' (Smart 2007:29).

However, 'to live a personal life is to have agency and to make choices' (Smart 2007:106) and just as in Smart's research of personal life subjects were 'rooted, yet fluid; bonded, yet self-determining' (Smart 2007:106), in these accounts too some respondents cut their attachments, dropped friends, left partners and described themselves as happier for it. But in the main, relational commitments and family ties were sustained despite difficulties. One respondent states 'I sometimes get frustrated with my family' but then goes on to emphasise their value: 'overall I enjoy spending time with them- knowing that they're there makes me happy' (1D29 F33). The safety and support that family can provide also reinforces Baggini's (2008) view that happiness for the majority is framed by familiarity and comfort.

A further reason why respondents sustain their family commitments and relationships is the way these represent "unconditional recognition". Whatever one's family role/s, be it aunt, parent, grandparent, child and sibling, one theme that many respondents across different ages identify as a continuous source of happiness and wellbeing is an enduring, unconditional, positive recognition and regard that family can provide. The importance of these relational goods highlights what Hookway (2018:109) sees as 'needy, vulnerable and interdependent' individuals for whom the positive identification of self is achieved in part through positive recognition from others. This can override otherwise important aspects of relational life, like sharing common interests. One respondent relates that a key source of happiness is 'my family with whom I am close with. I am very different in many ways to them, but they understand, love and accept me for whom I am' (ID23 M)

The significance of the family gathering or event in sustaining these bonds is also emphasised, although in keeping with a 'holistic' perspective (encompassing a range of negative as well as positive aspects (Cieslik 2014)), one respondent comments that 'like every social occasion, there can be tensions' (ID22 M46). Family occasions can be particularly important when these are infrequent, one respondent describing such an occasion as 'a mega happiness...when the whole family gathers: rare and immensely happy' (ID145 F78). Another respondent echoes this:

'We all live far away from each other so it is very special when we get together. We enjoy each other's company and always have a good time...I sometimes feel unhappy being so far away from them but being able to video call each other and read messages makes staying in touch much easier - I can't imagine how it must have felt for families who were separated in the past when the only communication was through letters' (ID134 M36)

This rare mention of digital communication shows that although the internet provides access to a 'global cultural supermarket' (Mathews 2012:385), one consequence of digital media is to help sustain and strengthen existing networks and bonds (Fox 2004; Miller 2016). For two other respondents, family events touch on themes of love, support and parochial altruism that characterise relational life in these accounts. But their value goes beyond this. Families can also be sources of inspiration, curiosity and joy, reflecting what Skey (2011:15) terms the 'libidinal quality' of everyday relational life:

'My family (with some exceptions) make me happy, I value my family relationships past and present. I will never forget my grandparents and still miss them every day, my 90 year old Aunt has always been an inspiration to me, my cousin is a big part of my life, and my children, nephews, nieces, and a great -nephew who was born last year, give me great love and joy' (ID201 F54)

'When I see my family it is always a joy, hearing what they are doing, their enthusiasms, even problems, observing how they really are and responding appropriately, or just keeping quiet. Of course, there are downsides to family but I enjoy the challenge of finding out what is wrong, trying to put right what my part in it might be...family, with its generosity, exchanges of information and opinions, love and support, is the most important part of my life, and happiest' (ID75 F79)

Recognition and affirmation needs can also be satisfied by non-human family members -pets. For those that cited their pet as a source of happiness, it seems that animals can be more reliable than humans when it comes to feeling needed and loved. Here are two indicative responses:

'Cats! they have been lovely life-long friends to me- they never change or turn against me' (ID25 F27)

'my dog. As with any dog the constant loyalty and delight at seeing you again is a continual joy' (ID70 F62)

Significant Events

Q3, 4 and 5 of the directive that allow respondents to explore happiness across different temporal zones can reveal not only what is held to be most significant for their happiness but also what matters most in their lives as a whole (Thin 2012; Walker & Kavedžija 2015). Responses to these questions further illustrate the significance of intimate, relational life through key moments. When asked for their "happiest day", many opt for their wedding:

‘Obviously my wedding day has to count, as I am sure it would with many others- it was simply the most joyous day from start to finish, the point at which your whole life pivots. Surrounded by all the people who mean most to you - family and lifelong friends. That and having permission to be the centre of attention, or at least sharing that with the person whom you have fallen utterly and hopelessly in love with. It was a lot of fun to put a stamp of your own personality on the day, from our choices in music to the trimmings. There was a lot of creativity too - my wife made her own wedding dress, and those of her bridesmaids too. She used the same material in my waistcoat and that of my best man, as the dress she made for her chief bridesmaid’ (ID42 M47)

Weddings can partly be thought about as a public stage (Goffman 1990). Although creative autonomy is emphasised by how this respondent tried ‘to put a stamp of your own personality on the day’, weddings have cultural as well as personal significance (Smart 2007; Hockey & James 2003). The particular set of normative expectations they represent can be observed in the way ID42’s description begins with ‘obviously’ and also in the assumption that ‘many others’ would also choose this occasion, implying that the reader along with the writer will be fully aware of the way weddings are conveyed as a, if not *the*, key moment in a person’s life. He describes this as ‘the point at which your whole life pivots’, echoing Thin’s (2012) point about the tendency of first-person narratives to be structured around such ‘turning points’.

The stagecraft of events like weddings links to Goffman’s (1990) idea of the dramaturgical self where individuals are obliged to adapt to and publicly present emotions deemed culturally appropriate. This is what Ahmed (2010) terms the ‘civilization of affects’, how individuals are obliged to produce a particular set of emotions to be and feel accepted by society. Yet while many respondents, both male and female, described their wedding as the happiest day of their lives, ID42 is atypical in narrating his wedding day as something approaching the heightened emotions that constitutes the ‘happiness script’ (Ahmed 2010:51) of weddings. More typical of reflections about weddings is their consequentialist or symbolic significance for the happy and lifelong partnerships that came after, as two older respondents describe:

‘the day I married my childhood sweetheart. It was over 50 years ago and seeing him suddenly after an absence can still excite me’ (ID123 F74)

‘my wedding day. I was young, only twenty, but very mature and certain of the future and the rightness of what I was doing. I was correct to be so as I have never in forty-seven years regretted it although our lives have not always been easy sailing’ (ID110 F67)

In these reflections, weddings are not pinnacles of happiness but pathways, significant in the context of the overall journey. Their identification as “happiest days” are evaluated as being happiest not necessarily because of how they were experienced at the time but in terms of their overall meaning and contribution to sustained happiness across the lifespan. This also connects to the temporal problem of when happiness becomes ‘knowable’ (Thin 2012), explored in Chapter Four.

Other respondents opt for different moments- the day they first met their partner, the first few months of “being in love”, moving in together. Tellingly, it is these moments and periods, rather than weddings, that respondents would be happy to relive. One respondent chooses her wedding day but only so that this time around she could actually enjoy it- all she felt the first time was stress. This underscores a wider ambivalence about cultural and gendered expectations of weddings. Two female respondents, for example, describe their wedding day as enjoyable but only because scaling back the numbers of attendees or not notifying anyone beforehand reduced the weight of expectation. Another relates how these pressures affected her wedding day:

‘I know as a married woman I'm supposed to say that my wedding day was my happiest and it was to some degree but if I'm honest my husband and I got married to keep our parents happy. We did have a lovely day but I suppose my happiest was the day we moved in together as that was more of a commitment and I felt safe and content, the wedding day was just reinforcement for other people and to demonstrate our commitment in front of family and friends’ (ID150 F49)

Her recognition of but also disassociation from the expectations of ‘a married woman’ and what ‘I’m supposed to say’ reinforces an earlier point concerning the capacity of agents to critique not just the gendered cultural norms of weddings but a wider bundle of social scripts about happiness. At the same time, the emergence of the ‘knowing subject’ in contemporary research who assert their personal identity and autonomy by demonstrating their knowledge of cultural repertoires and discourses and then disassociating themselves from these, is, Savage (2007) suggests in his analysis of Mass Observation data, very revealing in understanding social class. He describes a cultural shift in emphasising individual responsibility for achieving a unique personal identity that diminishes the more socially ascribed identities of class. This has led to an emerging aesthetic or ‘class-talk’ characterised by distancing oneself from and critically engaging with a wide range of social categories and practices and ‘choosing’ which ones to adopt or disregard according to personal taste. His point about the Mass Observation Panel is that middle-class participants are particularly skilful and at ease in effacing class identities in this way. Paradoxically, this merely reinforces their middle-class credentials by their ability to rise above the popular or mainstream. However, one

problem with this perspective is that it can neglect what matters to people and why they evaluate objects as conducive (or otherwise) to their wellbeing, as agents 'whose fundamental relationship to the world is one of concern' (Sayer 2011:1).

Another deeply personal event that also operates at a 'broad cultural and social level of significance' (Smart 2007:51) is the birth of one's children. Reflecting eudemonic ideas about happiness, this event shows the problems, judging by some of the more harrowing descriptions of childbirth in these accounts, of calling a moment happy by the greater quantity of pleasure over pain. But the birth of children, like weddings, has a dual nature as means and ends. Respondents recount the "magic" and incredulity at creating new life or seeing their babies' faces for the first time but this is typically interwoven with a broader narrative about how children bring meaning to one's life.

Friendship

In a celebrated passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle affirms the significance of friendship for a happy life:

'it is also surely paradoxical to present the man of perfect happiness as solitary; for nobody would choose to have all the good things in the world by himself, because man is a social creature¹³ and naturally constituted to live in company' (Aristotle 2004:246)

Although the significance of friendship does not necessarily attain the depth of significance that partners and family members represent, taking the accounts as a whole, friends are more frequently cited as sources of happiness than any other personal relationship. This aligns with happiness research carried out through the 'Day Reconstruction Method' (Kahneman & Kruger 2006) that show friends to be the company individuals most enjoy (Haidt 2006).

On one level, the importance of friendship bears similarities with other close relationships, to the extent that for one respondent friendship and family are elided: 'Being part of a 'family' unit - not necessarily a literal family, but in my case it tends to be the family of friends who mean the most to me' (ID41 M35). Like family, friendship implies mutual commitments developed over sustained periods of time and it is long-lasting friendship that seem particularly significant, with one respondent referring to his closest friend as the 'old faithful' (ID103 M43). The pleasure of company with 'old' friends is also emphasised:

'talking and laughing with my good old friends' (ID109 F39)

¹³ Sometimes translated as 'social animal'

‘Being with old friends and sharing conversations/ memories that don't need any prior explanation to begin again’ (ID200 M28)

Therefore, one distinct advantage of enduring friendships is the sense of comfort they represent, ones, as ID200 states, that ‘don’t need any prior explanation to begin with’. Bypassing potentially awkward social interaction links to what Fox (2004) and Baggini (2008) highlight as a paradox in British cultural life: the importance of close friendships highlights a general lack of ease and sure-footedness in social situations; old friends provide ‘temporary remission’ (Fox 2004:181) from this putatively national trait.

While the conversation that require no prior explanations implies an “easier” interaction, the value of these friendships is precisely in their being hard-won. Friendship needs ‘time and intimacy’ (Aristotle 2004:206), and ‘continued immersion in activities’ (Sayer 2011:125). As Aristotle (2004:206) puts it, while ‘the wish for friendship develops rapidly, friendship does not’. Another value of these long-lasting relationships is authenticity; one respondent derives happiness from her friends ‘because I feel I can be myself with them’ (ID29 F33). The value of authenticity is also conveyed by another respondent who appreciates a friend because ‘I can rely on her honesty and friendship after 35 years’ (ID150 F49). Honesty implies both openness and an ability to disagree and challenge, yet in ID150’s case it is underscored by unconditional regard: ‘she never judges me’.

Friendship is strengthened through shared activities; ‘nothing is more characteristic of friendship than spending time together’ (Aristotle 2004:208). Given the size and diversity of the cohort, there were an enormous range of these activities. Grouping them into thematic categories, two I developed were ‘together’ and continuous’, shared activities characterised by their ongoing character- these were not ‘one-offs’, highlighting Skey’s (2011:22) ideas of the significance of ‘temporal regularities’ and familiar ‘zones of operation’ in everyday social life that helps to provide coherency and ontological security. Here are three examples from the directive:

‘I love to spend time with friends. That really makes me happy...I particularly enjoy spending time with my best friend J. We've been through such similar things in our lives. We even have the same disabilities. We sit and have a cup of tea together, and chat, and put the world to rights’ (ID151 F49)

‘Going out for a drink with my friend A makes me happy, as we are simpatico. He is younger than me but we have wonderful conversations about books films and everything else; Laughing my head off with my friend C! She is unknown comedy genius and can have me in

stitches faster than anyone I know...seeing my best friend G, she and I meet at least once a week' (ID150 M49)

These excerpts, in the description of shared cultural passions, enjoyable conversation, laughter, also underline the libidinal qualities (Skey 2011) of friendship. That these rituals are grounded in tea and alcohol also show how individual experiences of happiness highlight broader cultural customs (Mathews 2012). Eating and drinking are popular sources of happiness in the accounts and frequently have a sociable aspect. One respondent reflects on this, also signalling how particular sources of happiness are 'experientially salient' (Thin 2012), that is, normatively evaluated as being the "best" or "higher":

'Having a meal with friends. This list is not in order, but if it were then this would rate amongst the top two or three' (ID160 F35)

Friendships are further examples of 'the relational quality of human social being...to form attachments and commitments' (Sayer 2011:124) and how personal life depicted in sociological treatises as one of 'fragmentation, differentiation, separation and autonomy...needs to be counter-balanced by an awareness of connection, relationship, reciprocal emotion, entwinement' (Smart 2007:189). As with marriages, long-term partnerships and family, friendships are not uncomplicated "goods"; one respondent links unhappiness with 'falling out with a friend which does happen now and again'. However, while the large majority of respondents provided some relational or sociable context to their experience and perception of happiness, solitude was also cited as a source of happiness. Much has been written in the last few years (e.g. Laing 2016), responding to data showing increasing numbers of people in the UK living alone (ONS 2018), about the distinction between loneliness and solitude in modern society. This is succinctly captured by one respondent:

'Loneliness can be terrible, but if you are happy in your own company then that is solitude and can be a positive thing, alone with your own thoughts for company, seeing just what turns up. It makes me happy' (ID42 M47)

Wider Connected Selves

Associational activity can generate a deeper sense of satisfaction through the co-mingling of the self with another person. Similar to Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) definition of flow explored in the literature review, involving a merger of the self with another subject, moments of happiness, for one respondent, involve 'making a connection with people and sharing something special' (ID160 F35). If a pleasure can be 'enhanced by being shared' (Sayer 2011:121), then part of this attraction may be 'that it was not sought egotistically' (Sayer 2011:123). Although company can certainly be beneficial

to participants in satisfying esteem needs, its dynamic also releases individuals from self-preoccupation. As one respondent puts it: 'it seems to me there is a bit of our human tendency to forget ourselves to the point where we are most happy when we share an experience' (ID81 M).

There is a paradox here. The greatest happiness a person can experience is when their sense of self evaporates. Yet this could represent a more authentic, connected self. Discovering joy through suppressing egotism links to a more eudemonic notion about happiness as a collaborative activity, something we participate in, not something we possess 'as a piece of property' (Aristotle 2004:247); social encounters and activities may 'best be enjoyed not by worrying about how you are feeling or what you are getting out of it, but by letting go' (Sayer 2011:123-124).

Sharing a moment of joy/celebration can produce something as simple as what one respondent calls 'a compatible feeling of warmth' (ID97 F77). However, these encounters can lead to something more 'cooperative and creative' (Sayer 2011:123), illustrated by ID51's comment when close friends 'sit and have a cup of tea together, and chat, and put the world to rights'. Through such conversational problem-solving they are involved in 'jointly creating something new...an emergent social product' (Sayer 2011:123). As Baggini (2008) and Skey (2011) emphasise, part of the richness of everyday life is in the creative possibilities of repeated habits and customs.

Although these moments are often experienced within intimate networks, they can also transcend these. For example, one respondent writes that 'nice conversation makes me feel joyful. even if I don't know the person very well' (ID25 F27). In the accounts, even fleeting, shared, smiles and other types of brief mutual recognition with strangers can generate these kinds of positive connections. Albeit temporarily the self becomes part of a wider whole, melting into an 'imaginative unity with the affective life of others' (Sayer 2011:123-124).

Why is this significant for happiness? The idea that individuals achieve a greater sense of meaning and flourishing through belonging to a wider whole was fundamental to the work of the early Sociologist Emile Durkheim (1990). He believed societies needed to find a way of elevating its members out of 'profane' individuated life and into the more 'sacred' collective realm through generating shared and unifying meanings. Indeed, one respondent's aspirations for a more communal life seems to echo 'functionalist' notions of personal value enhanced through belonging to a wider entity or collective enterprise (Haidt 2012), what he terms 'the pack':

'I am also drawn very much to the idea of a community who literally live and work together. I tend to be happiest when I feel like I am part of a pack and have a function in that pack, and am valued for being part of it' (ID41 M35)

The security and esteem that a group/community offers is also described as 'deep-down happiness...feeling secure, feeling that I belong in a group, that other people care for me and about me' (ID76 F74). Another Durkheimian notion is the importance of strengthening group belonging through shared participation in activities and rituals (Durkheim 1990) and 'collective ceremonials' (Skey 2013) which structure and order social life. Durkheim particularly had in mind religious worship; indeed, for the five respondents who are explicit in linking their faith to their happiness, collective practice is highly significant. One comments how 'being in Church surrounded by my church family, joining together in worship and feeling that sense of community, of support and friendship even in adversity is a happy feeling' (ID20 M40). The significance of faith in this excerpt is less to do with religious belief and more about, as ID20 puts it, 'feeling that sense of community'. Although Durkheim placed religious life at the centre of community, Haidt (2012) argues that this idea can be secularized to apply to all kinds of practices that involve communal bonding. For one respondent, her participation in a (non-faith) choir signifies a wider truth about collective human potential:

'Singing makes me happy. I sing with a choir and we have three or four performances a year/ more/ When singing with a lot of people (sometimes 300-400) it makes me feel like the human race might have enough people who give a damn and make the effort' (ID195 F45)

This is an excellent example of how collective endeavours can produce elevated or ennobling ideas about humanity (Haidt 2003). They are examples of 'communitas', fleeting but euphoric expressions of community (Delanty 2003), moments becoming increasingly ritualized in the UK calendar, for example in gathering together to watch national sports or going to summer festivals (Skey 2011). These activities are often associated with sartorial codes, body decoration and intoxication. One example of communitas in the accounts is where respondents draw on the experience of the 2012 London Olympics. It is one of the rare occasions where respondents explicitly link national identity and happiness (sport is also the sole occurrence of any explicit self-identification with the 'home nations' outside of England, one female respondent cites as a source of happiness an occasion when the Welsh rugby team defeated the English). One respondent chooses the London Olympics as one of her "happiest" days:

'"super saturday": we had a day trip to London with the children and my parents. The place was happy in itself, it was a lovely atmosphere, and the sun was shining. We saw many off-duty athletes from different countries sightseeing. That evening we watched Jessica Ennis

win her gold medal. It was one of those amazing days where I just felt proud of the athletes and proud to have witnessed it' (ID178 F)

Although expressions of national community have a potential dark side (Taylor 2011) in being constructed as 'us vs them', this seems a particularly benign example of a place 'happy in itself'. Pride in the successes of national competitors is joined to an inclusive image of athletes from different countries out sightseeing. Another potential dark side to community is the way majoritarian claims on norms and cultural legitimacy can exclude minorities; however, community can also be a source of strength for minority groups. One respondent writes about the 'gay ramblers' he is a long-term member of; its significance (alongside enjoyment of the activity) is the mutual support and solidarity the group provides. Other examples of participation in Civil Society- defined as 'associational life' that embodies values of 'a good society' (Edwards 2005)-can be observed in the following excerpts:

'Being with friends at the various local activities I participate in - Trefoil Guild, Church events, Welcoming at Bristol Cathedral, volunteer helper at National Trust property' (ID39 F70)

'Joining the Women's institute over 30 years ago and making some very good friends. I am still a regular member and try to get to all the monthly meetings' (ID77 F73)

'Helping with our local MS group has bought me much pleasure and friendship' (ID110 F67)

One mainstay of happiness research has been the positive association between volunteering and self-reported life-satisfaction (Layard et al 2013) and these responses provide some indication as to why this relationship exists. While the activities signify attachment and commitment to particular causes, the unifying significance for these respondents are themes of friendship and conviviality. In addition, the more traditional types of charities and civil society organisations mentioned (church, Women's Institute, the National Trust) and the ages and sex of these respondents link to research identifying a 'civic core' (Mohan & Bulloch 2012) in the UK. This describes a demographic: older, female, middle-class and rural who are most likely to vote, get involved in local civic affairs and contribute the most volunteering hours in the UK.

However, friendship and conviviality are insufficient to understanding how voluntary activity and happiness interconnect. A key motivation of volunteering is to make a social contribution (Brodie et al 2011), what Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi (2003:98) call 'an enlargement of the self' through attaching oneself to social causes. For one respondent, happiness is 'feeling that you are doing some good in the world, giving to charity, volunteering' (ID86 F49). Another respondent reflects on her activism and how this connects to her personal life:

‘I like to feel that I am "making a difference" which is why I feel I have felt the need to be part of various political campaigns all my life. I like to feel that there are connections between all my activities - my work, my socialism, my feminism, friendships and family life’ (ID165 F67)

For the 10-15 respondents who include volunteering¹⁴ and/or political activism in their responses, these were often long-term or lifelong commitments. As the above quote shows, these attachments can ‘come to constitute our character, identity and conception of ourselves’ (Haidt 2012:175) and so to some degree ‘flourishing comes to be dependent on the flourishing of our commitments’ (Sayer 2011:125)¹⁵. Furthermore, commitments to particular organisations, causes or fields may include ‘an identification with the domain, its history, traditions and goals :a feeling of solidarity with the field and its practitioners...a self-image arising from one’s own practice’ (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi (2003:98). This is connected to the way several respondents linked happiness to their role as Mass Observation participants, enjoying the writing process and the social value of their contribution. For one respondent, ‘writing for the MO makes me happy. It makes me happy to think my words will be part of social history’ (ID29 F33).

This sense of posterity or post-mortem legacy (Thin 2012), that their contributions have a lasting significance, is an example of what Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi (2003:98) describe as being ‘part of a stream...your contribution flows into the future’. Such meaningful pursuits which satisfy twin aims of personal satisfaction and social service demonstrate what Sayer (2011) terms ‘enlightened self-interest’, the sense in which self-interest and altruism are inextricably linked. This can also be observed at a more relational, everyday and informal level where making positive contribution to other’s people’s lives is an ingredient of personal happiness, as the following excerpts show:

‘Doing things for other people genuinely makes me really happy’ (ID172 F65)

‘doing something kind that makes someone else happy’ (ID133 M41)

‘The reward that comes of being able to help someone and watch that the burden that they have been carrying disappears or at least lightens because of your intervention’ (ID97 F77)

These comments, added to those concerning volunteering and activism, are expressive of eudemonic concepts of happiness because they are grounded in active citizenship, the disposition to

¹⁴ All Mass Observation panel participants are volunteers, so volunteering here denotes additional activities

¹⁵ This is something Engelke (2015) observes in his study of the happiness of British Humanists; their happiness was to some degree contingent on the flourishing of their secular values in wider society

treat people well and the idea of happiness as something one does, not something one “has” (Cieslik 2017). As eudemonic theorists (e.g. Sayer 2011, Nussbaum 1999) have stressed, following the 18th Century Philosopher Adam Smith (2013), our capacity to act well towards others can be understood partly by the ability to imagine oneself in the situation of the sufferer. As one respondent puts it:

‘I learnt early on in life visualising walking in other people's shoes made you realise their needs and knowing that you may have made that walk through life a bit easier is what makes me happiest’ (ID110 F67)

Sayer (2011:119) asserts that ‘without some capacity for fellow-feeling, we would struggle to function as social actors, certainly as ethical actors’. As ID110’s comment illustrates, this empathic capacity presupposes knowledge of our own vulnerability and fallibility. Sensitive to how we are being treated but also how we are treating others (Sayer 2011), our shared concerns and reciprocal needs are encapsulated in one telling response:

‘I feel happy when I am in receipt of other people's kindnesses and gratitude, and when I have performed a kindness to someone else and made them feel happy’ (ID194 M72)

Summary

Why is relational life so important for happiness? Across childhood and adulthood personal life is typically ‘embedded in a web of relationships’ (Smart 2007:45) and these can satisfy a range of psychosocial and affective needs: love and security seem to be particularly significant, also recognition, belonging and conviviality, among others. Another explanation of the strong association between relationships and happiness is the idea that our own wellbeing is bound up with that of others. This grounds happiness as a socially situated and often collaborative process (Cieslik 2017) but also highlights the interdependence of flourishing.

From family to voluntary associations, relational life moves outwards from the most intimate connections to social and civic expressions that show respondents feeling and acting as though they were part of a wider entity. This socially embedded feature of personal life in these accounts counters the ‘atomized and disconnected individualism’ (Smart 2007:28) that haunt some sociological accounts of the self (e.g. Furedi 2004) and encourages richer, thicker concepts of happiness and wellbeing (Thin 2012; Cieslik 2017). At the same time, the themes of love, comfort, security, familiarity, esteem and support expressed by respondents all lend support to Bagginis (2008) contention that the majority British expression of the happy life is one of relatively limited horizons, rooted in family and community networks.

A further benefit of an interpretive approach is to gain insight into the interplay of agency and custom and how individuals grapple with and negotiate social expectations with their own sense of what is important. For example, in personal life there are 'families we live by and families we live with' (Smart 2007:51), the former symbolizing the everyday and messy relational life actually experienced and the latter a more 'cultural, idealised, imaginary form...which contain certain positive expectations that are reinforced by social and cultural messaging e.g. weddings being the most special day of a woman's life' (Smart 2007:51). The ability to understand how the two interact depends partly on generating data that allows subjects themselves the opportunity to contrast idealised relational forms with the ones they live with. Further underlining a need for more sustained engagement with subjectively experienced happiness in sociological accounts is how, in contrast to the emphasis on 'happiness scripts' which individuals internalise, these subjective voices are not passive conformists to powerful social norms concerning happiness (Cieslik 2017) and are capable of critical engagement and resistance.

Chapter Six: Happiness through Meaningful Engagement

This chapter explores how happiness is positively associated with meaning, expressed through a range of activities and identities involving leisure, work, education and place. Given the size and diversity of the cohort, there were an enormous range of items (over 150 were coded) respondents either listed or reflected upon as sources of happiness, testament to 'the sheer variety and depth of attachments and commitments that individual human beings are able to develop' (Sayer 2011:127). Thematic analysis identified five underpinning or unifying themes of these meaningful engagements: 'Flow', achievement, elevation, learning and place, around which this chapter is structured.

The most frequently cited positive sources of happiness were, in descending order:

- Company of others
- Food and drink
- Reading
- Walking in the countryside
- Holidays/travelling
- Listening to music
- Creative pursuits/ hobbies
- Learning
- Cultural activities
- Work

The list has some similarities with other surveys of experienced happiness (e.g. Haidt 2006; Dolan 2014). Noticeable differences are the omission of sex (possibly reflecting the older demographic of the cohort) and the addition of learning. The list captures the ways happiness can be embedded in ordinary and everyday contexts (Cieslik 2014; Skey 2011) but attain significance through the meaning and valued conferred on particular activities and engagements. To take one of the most popular activities listed above, eating and drinking becomes meaningful through the contexts in which they occur, for example as the centrepiece of family gatherings, social occasions, domestic life or holidays abroad.

Consumerism and material values do not feature significantly as sources of happiness. Some respondents did cite shopping as a favourite pastime and a few wrote in glowing terms about particular objects they own, a fountain pen, a car, an angle-poise lamp. The value of these objects is linked to their design aesthetic, craftsmanship, role in domestic life as well as their meaning and value as personal possessions. Material goods do matter, up to a point.

FLOW: Immersion plus Meaning:

As explored in Chapter Two, psychologists (Csikszentmihalyi 1997; Seligman 2011) have developed an objective theory of pleasure founded on a wide range of empirical data about how pleasures are experienced in everyday life, called 'Flow'. In the theory, part of what raises satisfaction derived from an activity from mere sensory gratification into a more meaningful experience is a particular depth of 'absorption and immersion so that self-consciousness disappears' (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi 2003:99). Reading, one of the most popular sources of happiness, is one such activity, as the following responses show:

'losing myself completely in a good book' (ID16 F33)

'Reading a good book and escaping to be with the characters, empathising with their every emotion. The same can happen with a film but is easier when your own imagination fuels the escape' (ID20 F40)

The sense of absorption expressed as 'losing myself' chimes with Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) idea about how in 'flow' experiences, the self merges with the object of engagement. Also, the way in which, according to ID20, 'imagination fuels the escape', demonstrates how creativity and spontaneity can emerge through these experiences. They can also produce feelings of exhilaration, as illustrated in one description of creative projects:

'I lose myself in drawing or writing, in the same way as above but it is strange to be active but not quite there lost in the action. Totally absorbed and lost and exhilarating even if the output is not quite so on later inspection!' (ID109 F39)

This excerpt reflects the Aristotelean concept of praxis explored in Chapter Two; activities which are challenging and extending may not produce the ideal output, but it is the process itself that is rewarding. When 'lost in the action', as she puts it, activities are not consciously directed towards some additional end but are enjoyed for themselves. Also, her description of immersion whereby self-consciousness and time/space awareness diminish, echoes portrayals of social occasions in the previous chapter. Other activities also produce this sense of temporal and spatial displacement. Gardening, one of the most popular UK pastimes (Fox 2004) and positively associated with mental wellbeing (MIND 2020) is described by one respondent as 'a great form of escape and means of freeing of the mind from cares and woes' (ID109). This sense of mental tranquillity also links to the concept of 'ataraxia' (Epicurus 2013) explored in Chapter Four about happiness as freedom from mental stresses and anxieties.

But feelings of escape or immersion are unlikely by themselves to produce the deeper satisfactions that foster a sense of commitment to a particular practice. There needs to be some meaning attached to the activity otherwise these would merely constitute a string of intense experiences (Blackburn 2001) that had no wider significance. One respondent describes the joys of reading in ways that express both immersion and value: 'finding a book that sucks you in and speaks to you makes me feel happy' (ID54 F37). The implication of a book that speaks to you' is of learning, recognition or extending one's capacity in some way. For Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2003:94), 'there must be a germ of subjective importance in even a brief flow experience, something beyond moments of enjoyment, in particular, a sense that one's pursuits serve a larger purpose'. This 'larger purpose' is evident in one respondent's reflections about why writing for Mass Observation constitutes a source of happiness:

'writing makes me happy. Since I was a child, I have kept diaries or journals through good and bad times...having joined the MO has really enhanced the joy found from writing and has given me an extra purpose' (ID103 M43)

The link between pleasure and purpose places this example within the Eudemonic happiness tradition where 'the desire for meaning is viewed as a basic human motivation' and also how 'a sense that life has meaning is associated with wellbeing' (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi 2003:95). In addition, activities that become enduring commitments, like writing for Mass Observation, can also be seen to become constitutive of one's identity and sense of self (Sayer 2011). The synthesis of enjoyment, meaning, purpose and identity can elevate particular commitments into the key or central plotlines of narrative identity (Thin 2012). As with intimate relationships in the previous chapter, a sense of destiny can also be invoked, one respondent terms art 'a calling':

'I love art, and have been drawing and painting all my life. It is both extending and yet calming. This is a different kind of happiness' (ID195 F45)

Why this constitutes a 'different' kind of happiness may be partly appreciated through a later comment he makes that 'developing skill at something is very pleasurable, and is a more enduring pleasure': the greater reward may be proportionate to greater effort and 'being challenging in relation to skills- the exercise and development of which explains some of the enjoyment' (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi 2003:95). Developing one's skills and potential is a key aspect of Aristotle's idea of happiness as a process which involves developing and strengthening a wide variety of excellences. As Sayer (2011) notes, subsequent philosophers including Mill, Rawls and Marx have concurred with Aristotle that 'other things being equal, we tend to enjoy activities that

are skilled, varied and complex more than simple, repetitive ones...flourishing consists partly in being able to develop and use a wide range of our faculties' (Sayer 2011:114).

Aristotelean notions of excellences are contested ideas, not least because they represent, as the term "Aristotelean" suggests, the canonization of particular types of knowledge cultures in Western Societies traced back to the classical era (Savage 2015; McMahon 2006). Therefore, one potential sociological interpretation of FLOW, where certain activities are deemed more rewarding or having higher value, is how such ideas are filtered through powerful cultural lenses (Ahmed 2010).

Returning to the exploration of class, cultural capital and the MO demographic in Chapter Three, the particular types of cultural engagements described here (reading, writing, painting) map onto the 'higher' forms of cultural capital associated with the arts and humanities which are 'historically sanctioned and institutionalised' (Savage 2015:113). In Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital, appreciation of these highbrow cultural has 'the power of generating social advantage and are hence forms of "capital"' (Savage 2015:92).

Perhaps more importantly, it is how one engages in these cultural activities, the form the appreciation takes (Savage 2015), that denote one's sophistication and understanding of a 'hierarchy of practices' (Skey 2011:33). Firstly, this 'depends on valuing their abstract qualities- not seeking immediate indulgence or pleasure, but instead being able to appreciate them "at a distance", more cerebrally, in a way which permits their application across different contexts...and are seen to have universal status' (Savage 2015:97). By contrast, 'the lower senses are lower because they depend on the body' (Ahmed 2010:34), and 'the world of the popular and vulgar' (Savage 2015:98), of sensory and bodily satisfaction. Do these abstract ideas of value that characterise a knowing 'middle-class' aesthetic relate to the happiness accounts of what is, as underlined in Chapter Three, a largely middle-class demographic?

On the one hand, while reading and listening to music were among the most frequently cited activities associated with happiness, these do not necessarily imply 'higher' cultural forms of the practice in question. Reading was popular, but the vast majority didn't say which kinds of books they read; they could be highbrow 'literary fiction' or detective novels. Equally, when most respondents cited 'listening to music' as a source of happiness, this could mean Wagner or the Spice Girls. On the other hand, Flow experiences derive at least part of their pleasure from an additional value of meaning associated with an activity and some respondents did analyse cultural engagements on the basis of aesthetic discernment rather than immediate, sensory experience, as the following excerpt illustrates:

‘along with reading, music is my greatest pleasure. I’m talking not about the aesthetic pleasure derived from the music, but about the aesthetic pleasure triggering a consciousness of the fact that I’m experiencing aesthetic pleasure, and then in turn a sort of wonder and gratitude that the world is so ordered that I can experience this pleasure and be aware of it. It’s rather like a feedback loop/ There seems to be no way of knowing when, or if, the happiness will strike’ (ID107)

This fairly complicated excerpt is at one level a paean to the kinds of ‘higher’ pleasures that denote good taste, a conceptual hierarchy that can be traced back to classical theorists such as Aristotle and Plato (McMahon 2006), contrasting gratification of our primal or animal self with nobler sentiments of beings capable of reason. At the same time, ID107’s dramatic and passionate expressions, of a happiness that can ‘strike’ and of a sense of ‘wonder and gratitude’ are hardly those of ‘pure, disinterested taste...directed in the right way towards things that allow the subject to be free from any involvement with an object’ (Ahmed 2010:34). The responses reveal forms of ‘emotional reasoning’ (Sayer 2011) where feelings and analysis are co-mingled. Take ID195’s comment about painting being ‘both extending and calming’ while ID5 describes moments of ‘meaning and ecstasy...great elation at seeing some incredible work of art, the solar system with a telescope, listening to your favourite opera’.

In theories of cultural capital, an additional aspect of taste discernment is characterised by a sense of entitlement and authority’ (Savage 2015:99). In their analysis of the Great British Class Survey (GBCS) conducted in 2013, Savage and fellow researchers are struck by the way ‘the people we spoke to who had highbrow cultural tastes also had much more cultural confidence, or “ease”...the pride and assurance they exuded’ (Savage 2015:98-99). The emphatic language used in the excerpts above – ‘meaning and ecstasy’, ‘incredible art’, ‘great elation’- could denote a ‘remarkable belief in the innate and redemptive qualities of their highbrow cultural tastes’ (Savage 2015:100).

The GBCS also illustrated the ‘practice of culture-pushing...deliberately inflicting their tastes on others to broaden their horizons...culture becomes a wider social currency in which people differentiate between those with it, and those without it- who could do with more of it’ (Savage 2010:99-100). While in the accounts there was little explicit evidence of highbrow culture-pushing, there were examples of popular culture-resisting or ‘downwards contempt’ (Sennett 1998; Sayer 2011), ‘denigrating other forms of orientation...an inherent suspicion of more immediate, sensual reactions, culture that was seen as mass-produced, lowest common denominator’ (Savage 2015:123), particularly popular media such as TV, Facebook and tabloids. Such open criticisms of

mainstream consumption can be seen in Chapter Four where respondents critiqued what they saw as “popular” forms of happiness: materialism and passive consumption encouraged by mass media.

But there is a danger of conscripting subjective perceptions to an objective analysis of class. If Ahmed’s (2010) assertion that personal taste ‘is not a matter of chance’ can be broadly accepted, then we should also be aware of what Skey (2011) terms ‘ontological flattening’, levelling subjective taste to fit a social category. Not only does ‘excessive social constructionism downplay psychological and somatic factors’ (Thin 2012:324), calling a preference for higher art ‘bourgeois’ or ‘middle-class’ is all very well providing that art-loving, working class voices are silenced. For example, ID80, who is one of the most fulsome about the superior quality of high art - ‘there are also special occasions in the theatre or concert hall, when I am suddenly, aware of witnessing something almost spiritual’ spent much of his career as a postman.

In addition, the experiences of FLOW described by respondents in relation to cultural practices undermines a key concept of highbrow cultural capital: the knowingness of engagement, for example ‘the right way to talk about art’ (Baggini 2008:203). Baggini (2008:190) contrasts what he sees as self-consciousness of highbrow taste ‘valued as mere means...for the moral and intellectual benefits they confer’ with the non-pretension of more popular pastimes ‘enjoyed for their own sake...valued as ends’ (ibid). But to experience Flow in the way the respondents have described, as a ‘state of total immersion...what people sometimes call being in the zone’ (Haidt 2006:123), is to be engaged in activities appreciated not as a means but ends in themselves. Standing at a disembodied, knowing or cerebral distance to something is not an immersive experience: Therefore, no immersion, no flow. Empirical happiness research (Csikszentmihalyi 1997; Haidt 2003; Seligman 2011) has consistently shown that greater experienced happiness and satisfactions are derived from meaningful activities. Instead of reflecting the snobbishness of cultural elites, the value of ‘higher’ pleasures can be seen in more bottom-up, subjective terms.

Achievement: Leisure

Around a quarter of respondents linked achievement with happiness, making it one of the most frequent as well as significant themes emerging from the study. One respondent describes a ‘sense of accomplishment when creating things’ and how ‘making things makes me happy’ (ID55 M48). This sense of achievement connects to the concept of flow through themes of enjoyment and meaning but also in the way activities are ‘structured into goals and aims’ (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi 2003:98). This expresses the ‘growth metaphor’ (Thin 2012; Dean 2009)) of eudemonic happiness, linking achievement and accomplishment to ideas about ‘fulfilling one’s potential or growth and

striving for excellence...the highest human good involves activities that are goal-directed and have purpose' (Ryff & Singer 2008:17).

To be sure, the preference for a more demanding form of pleasure over simple indulgence can be seen, returning to ideas in the previous section, as a further manifestation of the 'symbolic power of cultural capital' (Savage 2015:50) where intellectually demanding or challenging activities cultivate a higher level of appreciation. Yet it may be hard to feel a sense of achievement if activities do not extend those engaged in them: 'skill development implies a sense of challenge which may have to be overcome or worked through' (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi 2003:98). The greater reward goes hand in hand with increased risk; failure is also possible. For one respondent, pleasure and frustration are twin possibilities of creative endeavours:

'completing a successful drawing or painting. It was only about twelve years ago I discovered that I could draw and started art classes and it has given me a lot of pleasure (and also much frustration!) ever since' (ID38 M71)

As 'storytelling beings' (Thin 2012:324), one satisfaction of achievement is its representing a complete narrative arc of beginning, middle and end. As one respondent writes, 'I love the satisfying feeling of setting a goal, working really hard, then achieving what you hoped' (ID34 F20). The significance of 'working really hard' is echoed by other respondents who grounded achievement in the challenging journey or process where obstacles are encountered and overcome. For example, a cause of happiness for another respondent is 'making things or finishing a project that I have worked hard on' (ID160 F35). That achievement becomes meaningful through hardship is a key narrative trope in life-course studies (Thin 2012: Hockey & James 2003). It may also speak to the idea of moral desert (Miller 2001) where the reward is just in proportion to the effort and difficulty of the task. For another respondent, a 'sense of achievement' is related to 'doing something I've worked really hard for, I thought I'd never be able to do, or something I've overcome the odds to achieve' (ID83 F).

An acknowledgement that achievement and fulfilment may require confronting difficulty and anxieties, something 'I thought I'd never be able to do, something I've overcome the odds to achieve' as ID83 puts it, may provide a corrective to gloomy sociological accounts of contemporary happiness regarding a flight from virtues such as self-discipline, sacrifice and commitment (Cieslik 2014). Indeed, the sense of the pursuit of meaning and purpose over what feels pleasurable is a key theme in the more demanding theory of eudemonic happiness (Baggini 2008; Vitterso 2016). This is invoked by one respondent for whom one source of happiness is 'completing a difficult task or something that I wasn't looking forward to' (ID150 F49).

Feelings of accomplishment can be realised in more prosaic contexts. For one respondent, ‘thinking “that’s a job well done” even if it is a boring or mundane list, brings me a sense of well-being’ (ID20 F40). ‘Feeling I have achieved something’, as another respondent reflects, can encompass both ‘something simple such as a chore, or something more complicated, such as understand or completing something complex’ (ID104 M64). As this suggests, task completion of any kind can be intrinsically satisfying (Ryff & Singer 2008). In contrast to the idea that happiness is an internalised entity and about monitoring and working on feelings (Hyman 2014), these small-scale achievements are tangible and concrete acts. They may well produce good or happy feelings, but these are dependent on some form of practical engagement, linked to the eudemonic idea that happiness is something people *do* (Vitterso 2016). Cooking is another of these activities, as the following responses illustrate:

‘Trying a new recipe, often out of my own head, and it turning out really well’ (ID91 F63)

‘Making a meal, baking a cake or making an item of clothing with my own hands is very satisfying and having others appreciate it is gratifying, especially if you know it isn’t perfect but they like it because you made it’ (ID20 F40)

These practical achievements underline the difference between pleasures ‘that have clear sensory and strong emotional components, and gratifications, that ‘ask more of us: they challenge us and make us extend ourselves’ (Seligman 2002:120). The food that turns out well when ID91 creates a recipe ‘out of my own head’ links achievement to extending one’s capacities or skills in some way. ID20’s creativity is channelled through various activities, but in all cases the significance of what she creates is their being appreciated by others despite not being ‘perfect’; creativity can connect us to others. In addition, the significance of making things ‘with my own hands’, as ID20 puts it, indicates not only the pride in practical expertise (that can be valued as highly as more aesthetic pursuits) but is also illustrative of a relationship with a process where people feel in control of the task. This sense of self-sufficiency is explored by another respondent:

‘Fixing something all by myself. People don’t know how to fix things these days, and stuff is so complicated that you often have to either throw it away or get someone in to do it for you. I took our vacuum cleaner apart and fixed it not so long ago, and that sense of achievement was fantastic!’ (ID178 F40)

This example is imbued with symbolic meaning about autonomy. But there is also an implied critique of modern culture regarding a loss of practical knowledge and detachment from the means of producing things we use (this is an important aspect of Marx’s account of wellbeing, explored in

more depth in Chapter Seven). Ryan & Deci (2000) and Pink (2010) have emphasised the link between happiness, mastery and personal autonomy, the 'freedom' implied in the latter term connecting to the confidence of mastering something that enable agents to shape the world around them, be it developing a career path or, in ID178's case, maintaining domestic appliances!

Practical skills also show how the body is an important resource in achievement. Exercise and physical exertion are associated with accomplishments through two of the most popular sources of happiness, walking and the natural environment. One respondent describes how 'climbing hills can leave you out of breath but when you get to the top if there is a great view then you can feel a sense of achievement' (ID48 F32). Such achievements have a dual character, both summative and dynamic. The summative aspect is the finish or endpoint, the reward of a 'great view' or other completion satisfaction; the dynamic aspect is the journey there, rewarding in itself. This dual nature of achievement is described by one respondent as 'having a product at the end of a process' (ID195 F45). These summative and dynamic aspects produce different qualities of enjoyment, as one respondent explains:

'walking in general makes me happy as I return feeling I've achieved a goal that I set myself. it is also a way to resolve any concerns or problems in my mind as I gain clarity from walking' (ID103 M43)

For ID103, walking can facilitate problem-solving and self-awareness, and this more dynamic notion that walking or hiking in the countryside is cognitively creative and charged with possibility has a rich philosophical heritage, most famously in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche (Solnit 2014). This example also shows how certain activities are intrinsically satisfying and the internal or intrinsic goods of practices are something one 45 years old female respondent reflects upon in detail with regards making art. Her sense of achievement and satisfaction are "not dependant on the product, or other people, or making anyone else feel anything' (ID195 F45). This idea that satisfaction is not dependent on others' approval or respect is also affirmed by another respondent (albeit in more general terms):

'Achieving something, solving a problem, acquiring a skill, learning something new, feeling that I've accomplished a goal, whether or not anyone else knows about it' (ID182 F51)

These examples illustrate a key point located both in Pink's (2011) work on motivation and in eudemonic psychology (Ryff & Singer 2008): mastery is an intrinsic aim because people enjoy developing skills and accomplishing things, regardless of the recognition this may bring. This links to a wider point that although accomplishment partly derives from what one respondent describes as

‘doing something I’m good at and succeeding’ (ID25 F27) or developing excellences in a specific domain, eudemonic happiness advocates making the most of one’s talents and capacities (Vitterso 2016) rather than becoming an expert in terms of some standardized, objective value. Another respondent alludes to ‘the feeling of accomplishment when I write, play (guitar), make some art (photograph, watercolour, pencil sketch) or complete a task to the best of my ability’ (ID89 M45).

But while these accomplishments do not seek the approval of others, many certainly appreciate the recognition when it arrives, ‘having my skills or efforts appreciated’ as one writes. Approval is another kind of reward. One respondent who read his poems at public events described his satisfaction at the positive feedback from the audience; another spoke of their delight when selling a picture for the first time. For another, ‘seeing my latest railway history article in one of the journals to which I contribute’ (ID194 M72) is a key source of satisfaction.

Achievement: Employment

As identified in Chapter two, being in employment is one of the top three predictors of higher self-reported life-satisfaction (ONS 2019) along with satisfaction with health and relationships. In another national survey (BSAS 2018), 90% of those polled agreed that work is good for mental health. At the same time, the percentage of the UK workforce who say they are satisfied with their job is much lower in comparison (just over 50%) with other key wellbeing domains such as satisfaction with relationships and health (ONS 2019).

The significance of employment lies partly in its direct relationship with income, ensuring that basic needs in modern societies can be met. Yet a range of studies (NEF 2012; Pink 2010) have suggested that satisfaction with work is weakly related to income, affirming the importance of jobs that provide employees with meaning, autonomy and opportunities to develop skills. This is supported by data (BSAS 2018) that indicates 60% of people would continue to work even if they no longer needed the money. The flipside is that well-paid jobs may not be satisfying: As one retired respondent comments: ‘As an adult I had a well-paid, but routine job which I “made up for” by various satisfying hobbies and activities’ (ID148 M71).

Fox (2004) contends that one persistent English cultural trait is complaining about work, even when the job is actually quite satisfying. The idea that it is a cultural taboo to be overly enthusiastic about working can be seen in the way one respondent writes an almost confessional sentence like ‘I know this seems odd but I enjoy my job and feel a sense of purpose’ (ID150 F49). However, cultural taboo or no, most respondents do not present as particularly engaged with their work, echoing low

satisfaction percentages in the UK as a whole. Even some of the positive comments are prefaced with statements like “overall I don’t really like my job but...”.

Higher job satisfaction can be mapped onto class inequalities. In UK job satisfaction data, professional and managerial occupations tend to report the highest satisfaction and routine jobs the lowest (CIPD 2019), although the positive correlation of professional occupation with satisfaction is not always consistent. For example, low paid agricultural workers rank very highly on job satisfaction and hairdressers have higher job satisfaction than civil servants despite earning half as much on average (ONS 2014). Even so, given the occupational class status of MO respondents identified in Chapter Three, with almost half mapping on to Categories 1 and 2 (professional and managerial) of the 8 level NS-SEC class schema (ONS 2019), higher than average satisfactions would be expected. For example, more of the MO respondents are (or were pre-retirement) teachers than any other profession, and teachers are in highest quintile of UK job satisfaction (ONS 2014).

For the respondents who described their jobs as a source of happiness, a sense of accomplishment was key. Often this involved a positive self-appraisal alongside recognition by colleagues and management. What makes one respondent, a Teaching Assistant, happy is ‘feeling I have done a job well: I had a very positive appraisal last year which gave me quite a boost!’ (ID156 F61). As Humanistic Psychologists (e.g. Maslow 1943) have suggested, self-esteem needs are grounded in both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, that we value ourselves but also that others value us. Therefore, while the simple self-affirmation expressed by one respondent as ‘the knowledge I’ve done a good job’ (ID132 M64) may be enough, it may also be hard to feel that we have achieved much if no-one else agrees (Sayer 2011). Indeed, feeling valued by one’s employer is seen as an important factor of positive workplace wellbeing according to a range of studies (NEF 2012; McLeod & Clarke 2013). For one respondent who works in Higher Education, both ‘achieving something in my work or getting some positive feedback’ (ID32 F25) are sources of satisfaction while in her role as a Teaching Assistant, ID44 illustrates how achievement and recognition are linked to ‘doing a good thing at school and being praised. A little bit of praise lasts me a long time!’ (ID44 F45).

However, the need for social recognition is not unconditional (Sayer 2007) nor solely directed at those in authority; it is particular others, people we respect, from whom recognition may particularly count. For one Civil Servant, it is ‘positive feedback from a respected colleague’ (ID89 M45) as opposed to colleagues per se that is valued. In addition, where work has clear objectives, particularly those that reflect the telos or purpose of the role in question, achieving these produces satisfaction. One respondent, who works as a Professional Fundraiser for a charity, describes a sense of

accomplishment triggered by fulfilling a key objective of the role, 'when a grant comes in and I feel useful and justified' (ID198 F41).

Research about happiness and wellbeing at work (Work Foundation 2011; NEF 2012; Krznaric 2012) echo eudemonic ideas 'that one's pursuits serve a larger purpose' (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi 2003:94). One of the ways this is expressed is making a positive difference to others, what one respondent describes as 'the buzz of helping someone else to achieve' (ID14 F21). As an advisor at a well-known advice charity puts it:

'if one of my clients at work says they feel better after seeing me it makes me happy. I feel as if I'm doing something useful and I've made someone feel just a tiny bit better' (ID197 F46)

In Chapter Five I explored some of the ways meaning, purpose and making a social contribution are linked to volunteering. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that in Voluntary Sector roles, facilitating others' wellbeing, reflecting broader values embraced by the Sector such as philanthropy and social justice (Milbourne 2013), is a source of satisfaction. One Welfare Officer derives satisfaction from 'some success at work such as helping a homeless person into a secure flat'. Satisfaction at work expressed as helping others links to the concept of praxis (Cieslik 2014) explored in Chapter Two where actors have to decide what to do in respect of the good and in response to the particulars of each case. This is not confined to any particular sector. One respondent expresses their satisfaction when able to successfully help others work through a problem or issue, writing 'I am happy if I have been able to help someone resolve a problem as a result of my knowledge and experience' (ID131 F49).

Another way of understanding workplace achievement is through the concept of virtue ethics. Sandel (2010), following Aristotle (2004), argues that identifying the honorifics or goods of a practice or role is to enquire after its telos, or purpose. In this section we have already seen examples of this: good work for an advice worker is being able to provide practical assistance, good work for a Welfare Officer is helping homeless people become housed. Accordingly, ideas about 'good' or 'excellent' teaching are grounded in the purposes of education, which, while impossible to define precisely (Sayer 2011), has to do with generating learning and stimulating the desire to learn. The excellences or virtues of teaching should therefore reflect this purpose. One teacher draws satisfaction in these terms:

‘Working in a school, when I have conversations with students that suggest they have grasped a concept, or are excited by an extracurricular activity, which might well lead to further opportunities for them’ (ID200 M28)

Others’ Achievements

Thus far achievements have been framed as personal or professional successes and can therefore appear individualistic in scope (Walker & Kavedžija 2015). But some respondents also derive satisfaction from the achievements of others. This can be linked to the concept of ‘parochial altruism’ (Thin 2012) explored in Chapter Five where achievements of family and friends were the primary focus, particularly for older respondents. As one put it, ‘happiness equals pride in the achievements of my family’ (ID58 F73) while another older male respondent is proud of his daughter’s career:

‘Watching our only daughter train to be a Nurse in our local hospital. At the present time she is a highly specialised nurse caring for cancer patients so we are very proud that she is doing such a worthwhile profession’ (ID77 M92)

Here, happiness and pride at others’ achievements can be linked to what is considered good or admirable in the eudemonic sense of living a happy life. He considers this a ‘worthwhile’ profession, illustrating how achievement by itself is a conditional good- an honorific achievement (Sandel 2010) is one that expresses virtue, in this case caring for others. For another respondent, what’s most important is ‘knowing my children are kind, decent people’ (ID26 F54).

Therefore, subjective happiness accounts are also normative appraisals of a more generalising and objective sense of what ought to be valued or what we should be happy with or about (Sayer 2011). Without this dimension, it would be difficult to comprehend why respondents value achievement when not personally involved or invested. This can be as simple, as one writes, when ‘seeing something done well makes me happy’ (ID42 M47) while personal satisfaction derived from the flourishing of others can also be seen in the comment ‘I take pleasure in seeing people fulfil their potential’ (ID9 F44). For another, a source of happiness is ‘reading biographies of people who have achieved good lives by hard work’ (ID85 F70). As Walker & Kavedžija (2015:1) assert, evaluations of happiness ‘stand in a particular relationship to virtue’.

Learning & Education

The link between happiness and learning emerged as an important theme in these accounts. This was unexpected considering its almost total absence as a causal factor of experienced happiness in quantitative happiness surveys explored in Chapter Two. One reason why people enjoy learning

relates to the eudemonic happiness tradition through the idea that 'the fullest representations of humanity show people to be curious, vital, and self-motivated...striving to learn' (Ryan & Deci 2000:68). There are many responses to Q2 that express this thirst for learning. One respondent attributes this to being 'naturally inquisitive. I have quite a studious nature so learning new things makes me happy' (ID29 F33).

The comments capture the sense of learning as intrinsic motivation, of being 'curious about the world around us' (Sayer 2011:114) as a "manifestation of the human tendency toward learning and creativity' (Ryan & Deci 2000:69). This relates to the eudemonic concept of happiness as an individual practice where 'at their best, they extend themselves; master new skills' (Ryan & Deci 2000:70). The joy of learning for its own sake is captured by one respondent as 'learning about things I didn't previously know, i.e- about science/space/medicine/ animals/ cultures' (ID47 F33) and for another, a source of happiness is 'being able to learn new things, doing courses, finding out about the world' (ID86 F49).

The acquisition of knowledge can be wide-ranging, one respondent describes a source of happiness as 'gaining knowledge about wide issues like the environment, human behaviour and relationships' (ID171 F65). But it can also be directed towards specific topics like history: 'reading about something I love and find fascinating. such as ancient religious beliefs finding new things about the past makes me happy' (ID169 F32). One younger female respondent who is training to be a psychologist writes that a source of happiness is 'reading a really interesting piece of psychological research which makes me go 'huh, I never knew that' (ID122 F28). Later in her account, in response to Q5 about imagining her 'happiest day', she writes 'I also can't wait until I qualify as a fully-fledged Psychologist'. This captures two important aspects, instrumental and dynamic, of learning. She enjoys her study and also looks forward to its conclusion, when she can realise a career goal of becoming a Professional Psychologist. The instrumental value of learning is also reflected in another comment about 'learning something new and thinking 'I get that now' and being able to go on and use your new knowledge' (ID20 F40).

This desire to learn "new things" is also associated with foreign travel; one way of learning about different cultures/countries is to experience them directly. In the following responses, encountering and discovering the "new" is emphasised:

'I am really happy when I get the chance to travel and see new places. I don't travel a lot, because logistically and financially it can be difficult, but when I do, I derive an enormous amount of happiness from seeing new places and having new experiences' (ID151 F49)

‘having new experiences through travel. visiting foreign countries- listen to music, meet people, try different food’ (ID102 M59)

As ID151 alludes to, foreign travel requires a certain amount of financial capital and signifies how socially legitimated objects of happiness (Ahmed 2010) like travel are distributed unevenly. In addition, the cultivation of the ‘foreign’ and the ‘new’ could be seen as a way of accruing ‘cultural capital’ as part of curating a self-conscious middle-class sensibility (Savage 2015). However, externalising personal feelings about travel to relative position and privilege in the social field would be to neglect some of the ways this activity has intrinsic value (Sayer 2011). As with other cultural engagements, there is very little self-consciousness or knowingness in how respondents engage with different cultures in terms of cultivating a persona of the ‘global citizen’ or ‘cultural omnivore’ (Savage 2015). Nor are these foreign discoveries concerned with appreciating with them at an aesthetic distance. Learning is about connecting with people too, ‘sharing time with people on our travels, learning about their lives and hopes’ (ID186 F56). This sense of learning as discovery, about new cultures, eating different food and meeting different people is part of what Ryan & Deci (2000:70) describe as ‘the tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one’s capacities, to explore, and to learn.’

Formal learning, particularly Higher Education (HE) settings, also emerged as a key theme. Its significance can be understood in life-course terms as a milestone or key moment that benefited the overall journey (Hockey & James 2003). This is consistent with UK happiness data (ONS 2019) that showed those with a degree twice as likely to self-identify as ‘very satisfied’ as those without a degree. Given that HE attainment is still shaped by parental background, this data also shows how happiness research, despite criticisms of it being a bourgeois preoccupation (Walker & Kavedžija 2015) can help shed light on core sociological topics like education inequality.

In responses to Q3 about identifying a happiest moment, day or period in the past, only weddings and births featured more frequently than HE. And whereas, as explored in Chapter 5, accounts of weddings and births contain ambivalent and complex characteristics, there was less ambiguity about these moments. One reason for this is achievement; around 10 respondents cited the day they received or find out about their grade. A few respondents refer to A-Level results and Professional Qualifications but most of these “happiest days” are concerned with the moment students learned their University qualification. Here are three examples:

‘Finding out what results I got for my degree. I thought I had failed and was convinced of this fact as I went over to get my results. Anyway, I ended up getting a 2:1 and that evening I went out to celebrate and met up with everyone and got drunk’ (ID7 F38)

‘getting the results of my university exams and finding that I had done well’ (ID104 M64)

‘Back in 1977 when I got my Degree result, that was a happy day’ (ID106 F57)

As ID7 tells us, part of the significance of receiving results is its dramatic quality- the fear of failure followed by the elation of success. In addition, this moment was not just about personal but also collective achievement. A younger respondent recalls getting her A-Level results and describes the moment as one signifying ‘communitas’ (Delanty 2003), a fleeting but powerful, collective euphoria:

‘The thing that made me feel so happy about the day was the fact everyone else was happy. There was a real sense of ‘blitz spirit’¹⁶ and comradeship in that we had worked together for so long and had all achieved good results. It made me happy to see that people who had worked hard had been rewarded for their efforts’ (ID77 F73)

This last account also draws implicitly on Aristotelean virtue ethics in the sense of just deserts (Sandel 2010), the intense group bonding she describes is amplified by the collective rewards for their endeavours. Educational achievement is at one level highly personal, yet its significance in these examples lies partly in the collaborative and social aspects of the experience. As Cieslik (2017) suggests, a focus on the interiority of happiness as conceptualised and captured in quantitative studies can mask the way moments of happiness are often co-produced. However, the most frequently cited education achievement is University Graduation, as this emblematic excerpt shows:

‘when I graduated with the Open University five years ago- it was a most enjoyable day but I would say it was one of the proudest days of my life, rather than happiest days. I felt proud, because I was told at 15 years old that I would never be able to do a degree, as I would never be capable, so to achieve a degree was an exciting moment in my life, and I felt so proud achieving the award’ (ID94 F40)

This respondent offers a key insight into why this achievement matters. She has overcome an obstacle that can be traced back to childhood and a negative judgement of her abilities, presumably by an adult in authority. Her academic achievement is in defeating a prediction that has presumably been psychologically ‘haunting and sticky’ (Smart 2007) and in overcoming this, a sense of equilibrium (and perhaps justice) has been restored (Thin 2012). The way educational achievement is framed by a wider context of overcoming obstacles is described by another respondent:

¹⁶ This is one of the rare occasions when respondents make such explicit “British” cultural references. The idea of a ‘Blitz spirit’, collective fortitude in the face of adversity, can be linked to the Stoic happiness tradition.

‘One of the happiest days of my life was the day I was accepted on to the MA course that I am currently on. I had suffered a few setbacks in the last years and it was just such great news and such a positive step forward’ (ID134 M36)

This example demonstrates the value in generating biographical data that situates happiness across the life-course. Without it, there would be no insight as to why university achievement meant so much, understood in the context of the ‘setbacks’ and the hurtful childhood experiences that came before. As explored in Chapter Four, this signifies a more holistic form of happiness where positive experiences often derive their meaning from the difficulties that preceded them (Cieslik 2017). These reflections on graduation are also significant in the way they include and intersect with some of the ‘key’ relational happiness factors explored in this chapter, celebrations involving intimate others and social recognition, as one mature student describes:

‘I had gone to university as a mature student in my early twenties and had worked very hard. It was a beautiful day and my mother and grandmother came to the presentation ceremony. It must've been a bit tedious for them watching hundreds of unknown young people processing through the hall, but I think they enjoyed it and I was blissfully happy’ (ID72 F62)

The significance of graduation is partly related to being a ‘governed and institutionalised’ (Skey 2013:88) rite of passage, historically structured into a national calendar. These officially-sanctioned commemorations of success connect individual happiness to national identity- personal success is publicly legitimised in ceremonies whose arcane rituals and formality are perhaps also why the experience might be a ‘bit tedious’ for ID72’s family members while being ‘blissfully happy’ for her. This is also a good example of the ‘modesty rules’ of English discursive culture (Fox 2004) where strong statements like ‘blissfully happy’ are undercut or downplayed, here in the irony that the same experience may have provoked opposite feelings in others. In addition, these educational rites of passage become key pegs or landmarks of personal and professional progression (Hockey & James 2003). One respondent reflects on three education-based ‘happy days’ which signify her career development while another describes two learning achievements bookending 20 years:

‘the day I heard I’d got into university [Sussex]...day I was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Open University...day Sussex Uni made me a honorary Professor’ (ID165 F67)

‘when I passed the final exams for my State Registered Nursing Exams closely followed 20 years later by achieving my BA Honours degree from the OU’ (ID73 F69)

As noted above, learning in these scenarios has consequential value in leading to good jobs and careers. As another respondent put it, 'passing exams set up future happy times' (ID96 F81). Comments like these underline Wolff's (2008) concept of 'fertile functionings' and how education can be an important platform for wellbeing although access to this social good is still a matter of privilege (Giddens & Sutton 2014). Also, ID73's response is the third mention of the Open University. This may be significant in the sense that being a mature student involves a different quality and meaning of experience. In the accounts, mature students tended to focus on the achievement of gaining a qualification whereas those who had attended University as a young adult, while also writing about academic achievement, included a broader narrative about university life as a youthful rite of passage involving dynamic, creative and lifechanging experiences. Take this reflection of studying drama at university:

'The happiest times of my life have been the ones where I have had almost complete creative freedom, but in an environment which was safe and encouraging. Studying drama at university being surrounded by stimulating, creative people, working (sometimes very hard) on creative projects, but with complete freedom and safety to fail without recrimination...These moments have been the happiest of my life because all I have had to do is show up, day after day, and bring my creativity, and interact with others who are there solely to further this creativity. Without any need to worry about money, or time, or delivery of a "hit" (ID41 M35)

In its almost idealistic depiction of university as a creative playground free of the constraints of adult life, university becomes a place where given the occasion 'to exercise our faculties and extend them' (Sayer 2011:114) individuals are 'agentic and inspired' (Sayer 2011:114) in the developmental sense of being 'active, inquisitive, curious, and playful' (Sayer 2011:114). Failure is permissible and expresses an important eudemonic principle whereby success is hard to attain (Aristotle 2004) and has to be worked on. Also significant is the sense of freedom contrasted with professional life that followed. This is echoed by another respondent:

'My happiest period of time, that stretches out in my memory as a long golden dream, is Trinity Term (summer term) during my second year in Oxford. None of my 2nd year work counted in my finals, so the second year was for personal growth and development as an artist. This reduced the pressure, which made my ideas flow more freely and I explored new ways of working in mixed media...a brief 8 weeks to thoroughly enjoy being young, being in Oxford, being surrounded by my friends...it was a magical 8 weeks, removed from the real world, in the Oxford bubble, and I learned so much about myself then. I cannot adequately

describe it, but these memories are very precious to me, from before I joined the world of careers and seriousness' (ID16 F33)

In addition to themes of 'assimilation, mastery, spontaneous interest, and exploration' (Ryan & Deci 2000:70), university life is recalled as a time, as ID16 writes, to 'enjoy being young' before the 'world of careers and seriousness'. This connects to what Cieslik (2017) identifies as a "riddle" of happiness when adults feel that they have lost their way and long to recapture youthful times of adventure and creativity. Another puzzle about ID16's recollections is how they are simultaneously unreal and yet also convey something authentic about self-development and understanding. It is a 'long golden dream', a 'magical 8 weeks' spent in a 'bubble' and yet these elegiac and quite nostalgic descriptions also relate to a time where she 'learned so much about myself'.

However, these memories may say more about the respondent's current state of mind, forming a gaze or lens through which past experiences are analysed. Memory can be mutable, changing at different points of the lifespan. But to reduce depictions of past experience as mere nostalgia is to detach them from the objects and social practices they concern and misses something important about learning experiences associated with achievement, overcoming adversity and encountering dynamic environments that foster creativity. If the experience of learning can be both represented as a catalyst but also as a pinnacle or peak experience, then, as I now go on to show, other domains and activities also trigger these "elevated" experiences of happiness.

Elevation/ Transcendence

Another dimension to experienced happiness is the way in which activities and experiences transport the subject above and beyond the prosaic into a more elevated psychic realm (Haidt 2003). These exalted impressions can emerge from very ordinary and mundane activities and settings (Skey 2011), as the following excerpt shows:

'One of the happiest days I've spent was about 10 years ago in Alnmouth on the north east coast. I walked on the beach which was nearly deserted, in August. It was warm and a bit drizzly but I was at one with the world' (ID49 F62)

As can be seen in the statement 'at one with the world', one aspect of an elevated experience is a sense of unity. "Awe in nature" is one of the ways Haidt believes (2003 & 2012) individuals express and experience elevation: 'we live most of our lives in the ordinary (profane) world, but we achieve our greatest joys in these brief moments of transit to the sacred world, in which we become simply a part of the whole' (Haidt 2003:283). Connectedness is central to these intense, fleeting experiences, as one respondent reflects upon:

‘Every day I appreciate beautiful things about nature. For some reason a very light breeze also makes me feel very happy - I have no idea how that happens. I think it somehow makes me feel in touch with the rest of the world’ (ID181 M75)

As Cieslik’s (2017:228) research on happiness also reveals, these ‘odd, sublime moments’ experienced in natural environments like the seaside and walking in the countryside can be invested with ‘an extraordinary or intense emotional significance’. His research subjects spoke ‘of how as humans just like animals we are connected to nature, all sharing the Earth, yet we often forget these links’ (Cieslik 2017:139). In a paradoxical sense, transit from the prosaic “here and now” is simultaneously a return to a more ‘grounded sense of ourselves’ (Cieslik 2017:139).

Another paradox of these episodes of transcendence and elevation is a tendency to use religious symbolism and expressions when no deity or theology is implied (Haidt 2003), for example in the use of words like ‘heavenly’, ‘sacred’ or ‘soul’. The latter is deployed by one respondent who describes a sublime happiness experience in nature as ‘walking on a hilltop, the wind blowing away the cobwebs feeling as though you could run or fly forever, as your soul soars out of the landscape’ (ID20 F40). Awe in nature is therefore connected to its power, producing a sense of personal humility expressed as one’s lack of special significance. One respondent writes about this profound realisation when watching waves on the beach:

‘I have a great feeling of happiness watch the waves lapping on the shore, or in wild weather, crashing on the beach. The power of the sea is something which as well as making me feel happy makes me realize how much other things control our lives.’ ID108 F83

Although there are associations here with Stoic and Epicurean philosophies explored in Chapter Four that emphasise accepting the limits of personhood (O’Keefe 2014), the perception of awe and one’s insignificance in the face of nature is something the Philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer wrote about at length. He contends that the power of nature and the awe this inspires reveals the fragility of an individual ‘as the frail phenomenon of will, which the slightest touch of these forces can utterly destroy, helpless against powerful nature, dependent, the victim of chance, a vanishing nothing in the presence of stupendous might’ (Schopenhauer 2012:145). Yet strangely, this frailty and nothingness that Schopenhauer describes, echoed by ID108’s realisation of ‘how much other things control our lives’ is also what makes this respondent ‘feel happy’. How is this?

For Schopenhauer (2012:145), these elevated experiences are simultaneously ‘a glimpse of a power beyond all comparison superior to the individual, threatening it with annihilation’ and also the revelation of ‘the eternal, peaceful, knowing subject...the subject itself free from all desires’.

Therefore, the sense of the self's annihilation leads to ID108's seemingly paradoxical feeling of happiness because, freed from desires and striving after some end or another, the self is instead glimpsed as part of the wider whole. This echoes the ways in which through sociable engagement and creative pursuits (explored previously and in Chapter Five) individuals feel their self-consciousness disappear to reveal a more "authentic" state of being. Far from being dwarfed or annihilated by the appreciation of an immense universe, we become part of it, greatly expanding and enlarging our understanding of ourselves. Other activities also engender this simultaneously annihilated and authentic self where, transcending the conceptual and perceptual framework of time and space. we 'lose ourselves temporarily and ecstatically' (Haidt 2003:283). Another respondent narrates this sense of transportation through yoga and meditation practice:

'I also like the feeling I get when I've been to yoga or when I do my meditation at home... the whole world has fallen away...my body feels completely still... I am quite safe...feel like my real self too, without the worries and obligations that usually jangle in my brain: that everything is all right' (ID117 F35)

At one level this is an archetypal 'Flow' experience, associated with the loss of self-consciousness and the merger of subject with the object of engagement. The more elevated quality in this instance is the deeper meaning and significance this experience assumes. Not only in the loss of self does ID177 'feel like my real self', but also 'quite safe...that everything is all right'. This accords with Schopenhauer's (2012:145) concept of the "sublime", an 'eternal, peaceful, knowing subject' who, transported into a higher psychic realm, is both obliterated and recreated, left with a sensation of communion and reconciliation with the wider world. Cieslik (2017) notes that in philosophical treatises about the sublime, culture and the arts can also trigger senses of belonging to or participating in a 'better' or 'nobler' humanity through appreciating beauty. In their reflections, respondents spoke about these experiences through a variety of cultural engagements - music, art, theatre, film- in ways that reflect Schopenhauer's (2012:142) idea of 'that disposition of frame of mind which has been called the state of the sublime'.

Strangely, having shown how his philosophy can shed light on some of the most passionate and engaged reflections about happiness across the whole cohort, Schopenhauer is also notorious for being the great pessimist of western philosophy (McMahon 2006). This is because for him, all talk of happiness is lashed to his concept of the "will-to-live", a striving which can never be satisfied. But within this misery of never-ending striving that Schopenhauer describes (and which can be connected to the psychological happiness trap of 'adaptation' explored in Chapter Two), there are consolations, specifically the moments when we transcend the "will-to-live" to contemplate beauty.

This 'aesthetic contemplation...exalts us' (Schopenhauer 2012:142) through 'the pleasure we receive from all beauty, the consolation which art affords' (Schopenhauer 2012:185). These exultant remarks are mirrored in the ways some respondents talk about the arts. For one, 'sometimes when we're in a gallery and I see a painting/photo that I particularly like, I will get tears of joy. I can't really describe it, but I feel peaceful and happy in those moments' (ID29 F33).

The sense of peacefulness ID29 refers to mirrors previous comments about experiencing sensations of uplift and connectedness. In theories of class aesthetics, cultural capital is accrued through experiencing the 'high arts' like painting at a cerebral distance (Savage 2015). There is none of that distance here. Rather than positioning oneself at an analytical distance from the object of enquiry, respondents describe embodied experiences, echoing Haidt's (2003) research on elevation. In addition to the 'tears of joy' ID29 describes, the emotional drama of these experiences can also be observed in the way ID103 relates how 'I find myself pierced with happiness' when listening to music on the radio.

Listening to music is one of the most popular activities associated with happiness. Music is an opportunity to 'forget the cares of life' (Schopenhauer 2012:185) with one respondent commenting 'it's a great escape and can really improve my mood' (ID25 F27). Like other engagements in this section, music produces elevated feelings (Haidt 2003), one respondent describing 'being uplifted by a live classical music performance of a piece I love' (ID49 F62).

Art and literature provoke similarly elevated sentiments. For one respondent, 'visiting art galleries and being exposed to beautiful art, ideas, culture' (ID88 F33) is a source of happiness, while another states that 'here is a certain joy which comes from things which are truly, effortlessly beautiful - usually for me it is some kind of art or nature, but occasionally people too' (ID41 M35). One respondent reflects on the nature of beauty in terms that connects the theorizing of Schopenhauer (2012) with Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) concept of 'flow': immersed in an activity, we can simultaneously lose our self-consciousness yet become part of something larger:

'A good book transports you beyond this world and lives with you...seeing beautiful things. artwork like travelling moves you out of yourself, does something to your soul. Just sometimes and not always the same piece has the same effect. As with music you can lose something and become absorbed almost a part of it' (ID109 F39)

Words like "pleasure" or terms like "positive emotions" employed by happiness researchers can't do justice to these experiences; there is something more significant going on, something transcendent. Yet as much as these experiences rely on immersion for their power, implying a fully, embodied

subject rather than the discerning critic, there is something strikingly self-assured about ID109's declaration that 'a good book transports you beyond this world' and also ID41's earlier comment about art that is 'truly effortlessly beautiful'. They express a 'remarkable belief in the innate and redemptive qualities of highbrow cultural tastes' (Savage 2015:100). However, such highbrow tastes no longer have the cultural cache they once held: 'the nature of cultural capital has changed, so that it now takes cosmopolitan and ironic forms which appear to be pluralist and anti-elitist' (Savage 2015:51). Wary of pretentiousness, "emerging cultural capital" is 'keen to demonstrate the eclectic nature of their taste...in a broad range of cultural activities' (Savage 2015:114) encompassing both highbrow and popular forms.

if 'it is one's ease and grace in moving between different genres, playing with classifications and typologies, which might count as cultural capital today' (Savage 2015:51), then the respondents lack this quality. As alluded to previously, there was very little engagement with social and digital media or with popular cultural forms. Since traditional cultural capital is 'an ageing form of cultural capital' (Savage 2015:113), then given the older demographic of the cohort this might be expected, though it is noticeable that most respondents quoted in this section are under the age of 50. Bluntly, they are uncool, in the sense of what's "hip" (Savage 2015) and knowing what's "in or out" (Baggini 2008). The quite fervent and enthusiastic ways in which respondents engaged with highbrow cultural forms is testament to their lack of 'emerging cultural capital' where highbrow culture is acceptable providing 'an ironic, detached, knowing orientation' (Savage 2015:117) is adopted.

A tendency to deploy fervent and dramatic language also constitutes a suspension of a 'taboo on earnestness...deeply embedded in English psyche' (Fox 2004:402), emphasising the practical and common-sense regarding both content and style. This stance guided reflections on the meaning of happiness in Chapter Four yet here this moderation is abandoned in favour of rhetorical flights and emotional intensity. This shift away from a doughtily empirical way of capturing experience is illustrated in the way one respondent refers to a "spiritual experience":

'There are also special occasions in the theatre or concert hall, when I am suddenly, aware of witnessing something almost spiritual. I do not think I have ever sat in audience so enthralled, so captivated. For days afterwards, any good thing seemed possible' (ID80 M28)

This sense of the spiritual, in which feelings of benevolence are produced that meant that 'for days afterwards, any good thing seemed possible', is echoed by a respondent who writes about appreciating beauty and how it galvanises 'a sort of wonder and gratitude that the world is so ordered that I can experience this pleasure and be aware of it' (ID107 M55). For Schopenhauer

(2012:143), this is explained by the ‘transcending of the will’, that is, of, glimpsing an elevated form of human being, of “we” than the “me” of self-interest.

Returning to a prior theme, ID80’s use of the term ‘spiritual’ does not imply deity. Schopenhauer too (2012:143) writes about ‘spiritual exaltation’ but is widely considered to have been an atheist (Berman 2014). For Haidt (2003), this language can be partly explained by the notion that where we sense something beautiful or positive about the natural environment or wider humanity we map our sentiments onto a “higher” social space, becoming elevated ourselves by our association with what we consider to be beautiful or awe-inspiring. This inspires expressions of divinity because it invokes something “God-like”, noble and pure. Although decline in religious belief over the last 30/40 years is one of the most socially significant trends in UK life (BSAS 2018), with only just over 50% of individuals associating with a religion, a significant sub-section (12%) believe in some kind of power, a “spiritual but not religious” (Burkeman 2012) perspective.

Key to this “higher” realm is the loss of ego. The capacity ‘to transcend self-interest and lose ourselves...in something larger’ (Haidt 2003:283) has an ethical and humanitarian dimension where individuals experience communion with others. This may explain the exception to the ‘taboo on earnestness’ rule that characterise the strong, emotive language respondents use to describe these experiences- it is not about the individual drawing attention to themselves. One respondent describes ‘the moments when you see something or talk to someone and it is a bit like the ground has melted away and you are learning or seeing or understanding something new and interesting’ (ID109 F39).

The cross-cultural understanding implied by this seemingly mundane encounter underlines the ethical implications of elevation and transcendence where, to return to ID80’s earlier comment, ‘all good things are possible’. As Haidt (2012) has noted in his empirical work, such transcendent and elevated experiences often produce the disposition to act generously and virtuously towards others. This dimension was theorized by Schopenhauer (2012:146) as how the ‘explanation of the sublime also applies to the ethical, to what is called the sublime character’. When an individual transcends time and space to become part of the wider whole, ‘he will consider less his individual lot than that of humanity in general’ (Schopenhauer 2012:146). Glimpses of this have already been seen e.g. Chapter Five’s exploration of volunteering. In Chapter Eight, social and political issues provide further examples where (un)happiness is associated with the “lot” of humanity.

Haidt suggests that these more elevated sources of happiness also reveal something important about human aims and motivations, ‘the cultivation of one’s higher, nobler self’ (Haidt 2012:124) and a longing ‘to be a part of something larger and nobler than ourselves’ (Haidt 2003:255). This has

sociological significance in the way Durkheim (1990:222-223) believed that particular cultural practices and rituals elevate individuals into 'the collective conscience...where individuals who compose the group feel themselves bound to each other' thus helping to ensure that societies maintained stability and coherence (although his practices are more formal and institutionalised, than those depicted here, which emanate from largely everyday moments). In addition, the desire to belong to something bigger than oneself mirrors eudemonic ideas of developing excellences through social contribution (Vitterso 2016). If such notions of elevated happiness didn't matter to us, Haidt (2012:125) asks, why 'are so many of us bothered by rampant materialism?' Indeed, these are exactly the kind of sentiments expressed by many respondents with regards to money and material values.

Place

Where else does happiness occur? As explored in Chapter Five, the significance of the home partly relates to its central role in family life. The significance of privacy in English culture (Fox 2004; Miller 2016) was also associated with the idea of the home as refuge. The domestic realm is also where many activities explored in this chapter take place: listening to music, reading, painting, gardening and cooking.

The home is also where possessions and material objects become linked to an idea of happiness. In response to Q2, a range of material objects connected with domestic life were cited. Very often these objects, like favourite crockery, books, furniture and photographs are described as cherished possessions. One respondent writes about her collection of Swansea porcelain; others write about heirlooms or other items that constitute symbols of personal or shared histories (Trentman 2017). 'These things positively resonate with meaning' (Smart 2007:180).

Particular objects, beds, sofas and kitchen tables among them, form part of a 'material culture of family living' (Smart 2007:34) that also have symbolic power. Trentman (2017:43) writes about how domestic objects 'elicit memories and stories...more than mere things, they are a collection of appropriated materials, invested with meaning and memory'. Of these objects, photographs were the most cited and reflected upon, particularly by older respondents. One respondent discovers a trove of photographs that trigger positive reflections about his life:

'I went through every photograph when I was moving in the Spring this year & I was de-cluttering. I was so impressed with my life when I looked at all the lovely times I have had so all in all I think I am very happy' (ID21 M84)

Photographs offer 'a material testament of who we are, where we have been' (Smart 2007:43). They can trigger reminders of the content and quality of personal history. 'Tied to memory, to relationships and to events' (Smart 2007:163), photographs provide powerful material stimulus for this kind of reflective activity. Comments like 'finding old photographs and remembering old (and happy!) times' (ID88 F33) and 'memories of lots of happy experiences from our holidays around the world' (ID78) are two examples of the way photographs 'are invested with relational meanings and also identity construction' (Smart 2007:169), becoming an important aspect of personal and collective biographies.

Yet these may obscure as much as they reveal. Memory itself, Smart (2007:42) suggests, 'can be magical...and a reliance on memory can produce an understanding of the past filtered through the present'. As Hyman (2014) also suggests, this process can work the other way around, the past serving as means to craft feelings of positivity in the present. Her research subjects used photographs to transform their feelings, transiting from a negative present via happy memories to a more pleasant state of mind through a "technology of the self" (Foucault 1988). But while photographs may serve as a mood-enhancer, they can be more poignant or bittersweet: images of those who have been lost or died.

The ways material and domestic objects like photographs serve as 'anchors for memory and reference points for stories' (Smart 2007:42) illustrate 'the idea of home as more than the sum of its parts...tied to memory, to relationships and to events' (Smart 2007:163). Books are the other domestic objects most commonly cited as favourite possessions in the home. Reading is one of the most popular pastimes, but books as physical objects are also valued. Books also illustrate the complex link between consumerism and possessions and how over time objects take on new meanings as emblems of personal identity (Smart 2007). As illustrated by the following comments, books have a myriad of functions: material reminders of enjoyment, part of the domestic furniture and transforming a room:

'I am a bibliophile, possibly bibliomaniac, I have approaching 8000 books in my house'
(ID149 M66)

'Books, I love books and my home is full of them' (ID130 F41)

'Sitting on the sofa in my "library"; a room in my house with custom-built oak shelves holding many many books' (ID128 F61)

The physical proximity of personal possessions can also bring comfort. In Chapter Five, the idea of the domestic refuge, primarily focused on family life, was briefly explored as a contrast to the more

disturbing outside world. This comfort of one's domestic environment surrounded by possessions is invoked here:

'My house, which is cosy and has a lovely friendly atmosphere and is filled with all my favourite things like a real fire, a grandfather clock, plants, my piano and photos of my family' (ID171 F65)

The friendly, welcoming connotations of the 'real fire' and the 'cosy' house with its valued possessions illustrate how 'materiality becomes an important feature of the importance of home' (Smart 2007:43). As another respondent puts it, 'there are moments of pure pleasure of being surrounded by my 'things' and in total comfort and seclusion' ID109 F39. She may be secluded but the implication is that one can never be lonely or alone when 'surrounded by my things'. In his concept of dramaturgy, Goffman (1990) describes how individuals create a public persona lived "on stage" and a more private "backstage" where we feel we can be our true selves. This may be one of the reasons why so much meaning and satisfaction is invested in the home - it is not only a place to relax and rest but also implies authentic being. However, as much as the home can be a positive expression of personal and family life, it can equally be the site of conflict and unhappiness, to be explored in Chapter Seven.

Where else does happiness occur? The countryside is a source of happiness for many respondents. This has already been observed in relation to walking/hiking in the countryside and to experiences of elevation, transcendence and awe. The idea that UK individuals are happier in natural environments than urban spaces is supported by UK happiness data: the geographical distribution of happiness shows that rural and seaside areas (particularly in the South) have residents with higher self-reported life satisfaction than cities. Of over 20 named places in the UK that have some positive association with happiness in the responses, only four are cities. Themes of beauty, weather, local and national identity may help to further explain attachment to natural settings, as the following two excerpts suggest:

'beautiful flowers, and lovely scenery. I especially love autumn sunlight slanting through trees, with beech trees on the Sussex Downs' (ID191 M69)

'Living in such a beautiful area of Britain, with the countryside and sea coast of Suffolk Being able to walk along the sea front after a short drive from home' (ID77 F73)

In both examples, the natural environment is associated with beauty. The literature on UK identity has noted a discursive tendency to contrast the "beautiful" and "unsullied" natural environment with a chaotic, industrial and unfriendly metropole (Cohen 2000; Bennett 2019). In this way, the

countryside can be weaponised as part of a nostalgic lament for something 'lost' (Cohen 2000). The physical landscape represents an important 'spatial and temporal regularity' of national identity and the nation as a 'coherent entity moving inexorably through time' (Skey 2013:88).

The association between landscape and national identity is underscored in the way that comments about the natural environment are one of the few occasions (sport has already been mentioned, political institutions will be the subject of Chapter 8) when respondents explicitly draw on the 'nation'. ID27's listing of the 'English countryside' as a source of happiness to some degree supports scholarly arguments that a key component of British/English identity¹⁷ is cemented in the physical landscape (Colls 2011; Bennett 2019). Even Cohen (2000:578), who writes about the 'totally doomed attempt to capture some essential, eternal, national characteristics' also concedes that a 'not so futile exercise seeks to find the essence of Englishness in landscape' (Cohen 2000:579).

Weather can also be 'defined in national terms' (Skey 2011:6). Both Skey (2011) and Fox (2004) think the reason weather is constantly drawn upon in social interaction is not about interest in the weather per se but to establish safe forms of social communication with others, what the anthropologist Fox terms 'social grooming' and Skey, a sociologist, 'phatic communication'. In addition, though it is often one of the first comments heard when talking to public audiences about happiness (the author's experience), weather is not a contributing factor to national happiness ratings (UNSDN 2019). If it were, why would the dark, cold climate of Scandinavia produce such happy citizens?

However, the significance of weather may have been underplayed. Its importance can be observed in the association between seasons and weather. Seasons are generally viewed positively. One respondent lists a source of happiness 'the English summer' (ID3 F48) but all four seasons are associated with happiness at one point or another. Yet the extent to which seasons are appreciated depends on the weather. Some respondents list winter as a source of happiness but, as was observed in previous excerpts about hiking, a cold and sunny winter day is a good thing but a rainy, winter day is not. Rain is always bad, as are dreary colours like grey. No respondent has a good word to say about either and the following response is emblematic:

'sunshine (or the lack of it) can have a significant bearing on the happiness. I have found living in the UK particularly difficult in this respect because of the constant greyiness of the

¹⁷ The countryside is one way scholars try to drive a wedge between Britishness and Englishness. Given that landscape is called both British and English by respondents shows how fuzzy these distinctions can be (Langlands 1999), to the extent of appearing to be a 'narcissism of minor differences' (Colls 2011:576)

weather. I remember when I lived in Sydney for a year, the winters were cold (relatively to the temperatures of the summer, although in UK terms they were quite warm!) but almost every day, despite it being cold, the skies were blue and the sun shone' (ID41 M35)

Landscape also becomes meaningful by its connection to the "local", particularly as favourite places: woods, seashores and views are all described. Accompanying ID27's written response are two photos of his local woodland along with a clipping from the local newspaper suggesting this land was under threat from developers. This is one of the things that make him unhappy. Yet there is more to locality than landscape. Two thirds of the UK population live less than 5 miles from where they were born so 'locality remains extremely important to people' (Baggini 2008:37). Signalling towards the sociological literature that emphasises the fragmentation of community, Baggini (2008:47) contends that attachment to the local is 'much stronger than many accounts of decline suggest'. Analysis of the accounts suggests that while locality may not be 'extremely' important it does nonetheless matter. Various respondents write about their 'local' pub, their 'favourite' local cafes, their local football teams, and, for older people particularly, the importance of having family and friends nearby. Most volunteering takes place locally, for example in the local church, hospice, and branch of the Women's Institute. They are clubbable in local ways too, belonging to local choirs, writers' groups and literary societies- the 'little platoons' of a healthy Civil Society (Norman 2011).

By contrast, foreign travel offers a counterpoint to what Baggini (2008:45) describes as the 'parochialism of mainstream British culture' because it satisfies the desire for the unfamiliar. "New" was a word frequently used when describing these trips. For one respondent, a source of happiness is 'going to new places or even just the thought of going to new places' (ID169 F32) while another writes 'I enjoy exploring new places, just wandering and unconstrained. I feel so free' (ID134 M36). Here, the 'new' and 'freedom' go hand in hand and for ID134 this means 'no ties, commitments, no chores'. Novelty and freedom can involve what ID135 calls 'the excitement of an international city' but also in quieter places where the pace slows, 'on quiet Greek islands where life can seem a lot simpler' (ID135 M37). The way respondents reflect on these trips echoes Baggini's (2008:47) contention that most people 'want variation but in moderation', temporary escape from the quotidian, not a radical overhaul. Tellingly, several respondents, when writing about their holidays as sources of happiness, also include the part of the trip where they return home.

Another reason to highlight travel is how foreign cities are more frequently associated with happiness than those in the UK. London is the exception that also proves the rule. The way respondents write about London is strikingly similar to how they describe foreign countries, as different and thrilling. None of those who associate London with moments of happiness live there

(and none of the cohort who live in London mention it at all!). London is a place to visit, for family weekends away or to partake in cultural activities like the theatre or an art exhibition. But London, like abroad, is constructed in terms of its difference to the rest of the UK, as the following excerpt indicates:

‘walking around London Town makes me extremely happy... soaking up the atmosphere, people watching and enjoying the mix of cultures on show... and before long I'm back in the safety of the Home Counties!’ (ID103 M43)

Although the vibrant and multicultural atmosphere ‘on show’ in London is being appreciated as if it were a performance rather than a place where people live, the excitement has threatening connotations. Just as some respondents like going home as part of the travel experience, so this respondent can return ‘before long’ to the ‘safety’ of the Home Counties. For other respondents, London, like being on holiday, is characterised and experienced as freedom, as the following excerpt suggests:

‘Going to London to the theatre, to see exhibitions or arthouse films with my partner... Taking abstract photographs in the sun of brutalist architecture, especially in London, trying to get the angles right, not feeling conspicuous, being unbothered by other people’ (ID135 M37)

The notion that London symbolizes freedom is underlined by 135’s opportunity to indulge in his hobby of photographing brutalist architecture ‘not feeling conspicuous, being unbothered by other people’. Echoing Bauman’s (2001) idea that freedom and security are often incommensurable values, the freedom that London represents is set against the insecurities and danger it also symbolizes. In responses about unhappiness, London becomes the site of a variety of modern social ills, including high pollution, career burn out, inconsiderate manners and terrorist attacks. The notion that the city is dangerous is quite literally the case when one Northern Irish respondent remembers a favourite time in his childhood, his example also reinforcing the positive association of good weather and the natural environment with happiness:

‘I certainly look back with great affection on the summer of 1976 as an idyllic period in my life. The weather was glorious and July and August passed in a blaze of sunshine. I was 15 at the time and living in a beautiful, quiet seaside village about twenty miles south of Belfast. For me and my childhood friends the Troubles might as well have been occurring on Mars’ (ID143 F69)

Summary

This chapter focused on key sources of happiness that are positively associated with meaning-in-life (Ryff 1989). Though these highlighted the diverse ways meaning can be experienced, some underlying themes emerged. In terms of ‘experiential salience’ (Thin 2012:324), some aspects of happiness are deemed more significant than others, particularly those associated with, achievement, learning and elevation. These can be mapped onto a three-dimensional social space (Thin 2012) of height (intense, peak experiences), depth (the meaning of these experiences) and width (their significance across the life-course).

While some of these happiness sources seemed to highlight the largely middle-class demographic of the cohort, particularly in terms of “highbrow culture” (Savage 2015), other aspects of cultural engagement also pointed to an older and non-urban cohort lacking what Savage (2015) terms “emerging cultural capital”, confident and knowing engagement with a diverse range of tastes and genres encompassing both popular and highbrow culture.

The focus on place revealed a preference for the natural environment that connected happiness to national and local identity. This echoes a longstanding tradition where landscape represents an eternal essence of a nation (Skey 2011) whereas cities are characterised by danger and flux. Up to a point, respondents embraced the new and different, but safely, particularly through foreign travel and learning experiences. Echoing the relational dimension to domestic life explored in Chapter Five, security and identity were also located in the home.

Chapter Seven: Sources of Individual Unhappiness

This chapter explores what respondents identify and reflect upon as their personal experience and perception of unhappiness. Firstly, holism, perspectives about unhappiness as a concept and the balance of happiness and unhappiness across the life-course; second, the “flipside” of relational happiness, how interdependence can bring pain as well as joy; third, personal deficits including lack, failure and shame; fourthly, socially-implicated unhappiness pertaining to disability, unemployment and poverty. The ways in which some respondents positioned themselves defensively or avoidantly when broaching the subject of unhappiness will also be addressed.

‘Holistic’ Unhappiness

Many sources of unhappiness are ordinary, quotidian annoyances like bad weather, being ill, feeling cold, being caught in traffic, losing or forgetting things, feeling tired. In the main, these instances are evaluated in holistic terms as being to some extent intrinsic to lived experience. Happiness and unhappiness interact, opposites to some degree but whose significance presupposes recognition of the other (Cieslik 2017). As one respondent put it:

‘Lots of things make me unhappy but they are just the flip side of being happy and I'll take life's ups and downs as they come’ (ID20 M40)

This comment mirrors explorations of the meanings of happiness documented in Chapter Four where unhappiness was viewed by many respondents in holistic terms, something unavoidable both in ordinary, everyday moments and in key episodes across the life-course, echoing other qualitative studies (Cieslik 2017; Hyman 2014). One form this took concerned the implausibility of a life without negative experiences or emotional pain:

‘happiness and unhappiness intertwine all the time’ (ID1 M83)

‘A great many things make me unhappy, mostly temporarily, for I know it will pass, as good times pass, so bad times’ (ID175 M65)

This holistic perspective underscores the moderate expectations concerning the scope of happiness (Walker & Kavedžija 2015) explored in Chapter Four. ID175’s acceptance of the impermanence of happy and unhappy episodes is also characteristic of Stoic philosophy where a disposition of equanimity is adopted towards the vicissitudes of fortune (Sellars 2014). One telling characteristic of the way respondents expressed the inevitability of feelings or experiences of unhappiness was through critical responses to the wording of Q6 of the directive: ‘Is there anything that makes you unhappy?’. One respondent retorted:

‘The implication was that perhaps we might harbour one or two things that make us unhappy and we could list them. Wow, my reality of life is that there are literally hundreds of things that make me unhappy’ (ID5 F39)

Other respondents also responded in this vein, many beginning their responses to Q6 with ‘lots’, perhaps to counter what they perceived to be the implicit nature of the framing of the question that unhappiness might be of marginal consideration or a subject to be avoided (in fact, this may have been deliberate, considering the comment made to me by one member of MO staff about this being ‘a nice, light-hearted directive’!). Illustrated below, two respondents were keen to emphasise the inevitable reality of negative experiences and episodes across a life course with its peaks and troughs (Thin 2012). Beginning their response to Q6 with ‘of course’ could be further evidence of a tacit rebuke to the assumptions behind the question.

‘Of course I have down days. That's part of being human’ (ID33 M70)

‘Of course I have had many unhappy times through my 70 years’ (ID39 F70)

A complication of making binary distinctions between happiness and unhappiness, as Thin (2012) points out in his critique of real-time SWB measures, is in isolating and labelling an experience as happy or unhappy at a particular point in time. This becomes problematic if episodes experienced unhappily at the time are then recounted as favourable or prudential in terms of the overall journey or self-development. An example of this is provided by one respondent who describes an unhappy episode involving her grandson’s failure to get into university (a good example too of how unhappiness accounts are not always self-directed and demonstrate concern for others). However, the consequence was for her grandson to qualify as a fireman; as she reflects, ‘sometimes things work out for the best’ (ID10 F75).

Therefore, negative episodes may have “silver linings” (Cieslik 2017). In the opposite direction, life is also “bittersweet”: happy episodes become particularly poignant through the tragedy or misfortune that follow. Some of the richest data contained in the directive are responses to Q3 and Q4 which prompt respondents to reflect on past experiences. While many respondents used the opportunity to recount episodes (like weddings) which were memorable either for the pleasure conferred at the time or in the context of their wider meaning for ‘continuous’ goods like long-term relationships, others narrated these happy days or episodes in more complex and poignant ways, including those marked by tragedy. One respondent describes his daughter’s wedding day in the context of her subsequent death:

‘The very happiest day of my life, and a day which at the time seemed almost unreal, was when my daughter got married. It was a glorious spring day. Friends and family gathered for the occasion which had been carefully planned by our daughter and her husband...the place was ours for the weekend and everything went off perfectly. My daughter was as happy as she had ever been even though she was unwell. I lived through it all as if in a wonderful dream and could not have imagined such a feeling of happiness. Two years later our daughter died’ (ID129 M74)

Another respondent recalls the preparation for her wedding as the happiest in her life. Then her fiancée ‘died in a car crash’. Reflecting on this, she writes ‘I don’t believe I’ll ever have a happier day’ (ID170 F61). Such recollections offer some insight about the varying depth of unhappiness. For Smart (2007:52), certain events have “sticky” or “haunting” qualities, critical moments that have continuous, long-lasting consequences for individuals. If human beings are “storytelling beings” (Hockey & James 2003; Plummer 2001), then there are particular episodes and moments that are central to the plot.

Relational Life

One key feature of happiness research (ONS 2019; UNSDN 2019; Layard 2011) is the significance of relational life in determining unhappiness. What qualitative data provides is additional insight into why this matters so much and to highlight the precariousness of positive wellbeing. One of these insights could be termed the “flipside” of happiness, the way, according to one respondent ‘the things that make happy, have the dark side’ (ID10 F75), and how for another, ‘often the same thing that might make you happy on one side makes you unhappy on the other side’ (ID48 F32). For many, this ‘thing’ is other people, as one telling comment (which also appeared in a more truncated form in Chapter Four) illustrates:

‘as a wise woman once said to me - what makes you happy? Other people. What makes you unhappy? Other people’ (ID155 M83)

As Smart (2007:137) asserts, ‘embeddedness and connectedness are not to be taken as a priori good things’, while separation and detachment in moments or key episodes can provide contentment or a “fresh start”. While relationality is a key source of flourishing, ‘the concept does not necessarily denote a warm, loving and consensual web of relationships’ (Smart 2007:49). In particular, the power of relationality is often poignantly expressed through the loss or absence of others, for while ‘this capacity for developing attachments and commitments that come to figure prominently in our well-being...can bring meaning, interest, satisfaction and fulfilment to people’s lives, in becoming

dependent on them they become vulnerable to their loss or damage, and hence suffer' (Sayer 2011:127).

A. Bereavement

Nowhere is this vulnerability better illustrated than through the experience of bereavement. In analysing both the frequency (cited by over 30 respondents) and the significance of bereavement, the death of loved ones is a continuous and deep source of unhappiness, one that creates an enduring sense of loss. For one respondent, 'I feel sad when I think of all the friends and family members who have died, as I miss them all so much' (ID85 F70).

Through what Smart (2007:45) terms the 'powerfully haunting' aspect of loss, absences are keenly felt, for 'where lives become embedded and interwoven... it becomes impossible for relationships to simply end...family relationships do not necessarily end with death' (Smart 2007:45). These losses, compared to other sources of unhappiness, are narrated by respondents as being uniquely harrowing, as the following excerpts demonstrate:

'the two children I conceived did not live. The situation broke my heart at the time and other peoples' hearts. The entire affair caused long-term unhappiness' (ID71 F59)

'I am happy unless something makes me unhappy but if possible I'll manage to sort out whatever it is. Except loss - I am thinking of a husband or child- nothing can be done about that' (ID188 F)

I explored in the last section the complex and somewhat paradoxical nature of responses to particular questions in the directive, where an invitation to recall and relive happiest days reveal key episodes of unhappiness. This is particularly true in terms of bereavement — one patterned response to the possibility of reliving a particular day was the chance to spend time with deceased loved ones, as the following excerpts show:

'the loss of family members and my pets still leaves scars. I think that the opportunity to spend time with those whilst appreciating them would be the ones I would choose without hesitation' (ID99 M45)

'to have my father around again-so many years after he died and I still miss him' (ID58 F73)

As illustrated by ID58's comment, time does not diminish the loss felt at the death of loved ones (and, as ID99 shows, not just human others!). Another striking feature of the responses to Q4 about reliving a particular day is the way this is transformed by many respondents into opportunities to correct mistakes or failures in the past that have led to ongoing regret. There is a particularly

poignant example of this in relation to what one respondent perceives as the preventable death of his son in a road accident and his own guilt:

‘If I could relive a moment in my life again, when would this be and why? The week before our son went off on his motorcycle holiday he had problems with the engine. I helped him sort them out. Need I say more’ (ID69 M83)

B. Suffering of others

The significance of relationality is further reflected in the 40 respondents who cite the suffering of friends, family and loved ones as sources of unhappiness. This highlights both the highly social and relational nature of ‘individual’ wellbeing and consequently the dis-embedded and under-socialized view of the individualistic ‘pursuit’ of happiness that underpins happiness surveys (Eichhorn 2014). Concern for significant others can, as Sayer (2011) and Haidt (2012) have stressed, become fused with and sometimes even override self-concern. For example, one respondent states that ‘I am unhappy when my partner or my children are unhappy or worried. These are the things that drive me the most, and I will do a lot to stop or avoid these from happening’ (ID55 M48). Other examples concern debilitating illness and disease, old age and loneliness:

‘I am rendered unhappy when I learn that my son is unwell. I am often plunged into despondency...he has suffered from Crohn's Disease since he was a teenager, and now has to deal with cancer’ (ID194 M72)

‘witnessing my Mum get dementia and her putting clothes on inside out, forgetting what day it was and seeing my Dad try his best to look after her. Still seeing my Dad now on his own after 58 years of marriage looking lonely. That is a ‘stabbing’ unhappiness that I can never resolve’ (ID197 F46)

Another respondent states how ‘seeing other people sad or unhappy also makes me unhappy, especially when I can't solve their unhappiness’ (ID133 F41). An inability to resolve the suffering of others can engender ‘a sense of powerlessness and an inability to know what to do about the worries that beset one’ (Smart 2007:139). Respondents are not only vulnerable to how others are faring, but also to their lack of control in this regard, leading to feelings of frustration and helplessness. One respondent describes ‘feeling helpless when seeing my sons upset or depressed and knowing I can't do anything to help’ (ID30 F48).

The experience of anxiety is a key component of sociological theorizing about “anomie” or normlessness (Jones 2003; Durkheim 1990) and in recent decades (Bauman 2001; Beck 1992) the heightened sense of personal risk of modern lives. However, these tend to overlook the other-

oriented content of anxiety; in a more relational and socially-embedded appreciation of wellbeing, people are vulnerable to how others are faring, yet to see this as something purely 'altruistic' would be to neglect the way in which the concept of self-interest can encompass a broader range of mutual needs and dependencies. This entails, on the one hand, feeling loved, valued, cared for and supported but the reciprocal nature of these needs are also highly significant, in that caring, loving and supporting others emerges as a theme. Anxiety can also be motivational, impelling individuals towards caring for others, as can be observed by one respondent's comment: 'I do get worried sometimes about sick friends but do my best to support them' (ID12 F81).

Concern for the suffering of others is often delimited by the particularly 'thick' bonds of family and close friends, highlighting the concept of parochial/kin altruism (Thin 2012; Baggin 2008) explored in Chapter Five. This can take unexpected forms. As Thin (2012) has noted, one important global characteristic of wellbeing and happiness, post-mortem welfare, tends not to feature in more secular Western narratives. One respondent however, in looking forward to his 'happiest' day, reveals his concern for the post-mortem fate of loved ones that connect to Christian doctrine on the fate of the soul (McMahon 2006):

'The day I stand before the Lord and give an account of my life. I hope in some small way He might be pleased with some of my actions in my life. Continuing on with that same day, the saddest moment might be finding out that some of my loved ones did not make it' (ID23 M)

C. Family Conflict

Families may 'either offer ontological security or be experienced as psychologically and emotionally suffocating' (Smart 2007:45). I explored in Chapter Five how family life boosted happiness. On the flipside, conflict and tensions within the family unit are cited by many respondents as key sources of personal unhappiness. In her book on personal life in the UK, Smart (2007) critiques the 'individualisation' thesis of sociologists such as Bauman (2001) for exaggerating the extent to which individuals in Western societies have more fluid attachments to others and feel free to exit these when it no longer suits them to remain. She draws on the willingness of her research subjects to endure, negotiate and work at difficult relationships and the two excerpts below echo this point:

'I am unhappy if there are disputes in the family for whatever reason and as a result two members just do not speak, sometimes for years. This happened between a sister of mine and my brother but eventually they agreed to disagree but not fall out about it....two of my grandchildren are at loggerheads with each other but I am hoping they will resolve it as they

have done in the past. Happy families don't just happen there has to be input from everyone and tolerance for those who have yet to input. It has to be worked at' (ID11 F78)

'Unhappiness has all been connected with family problems and have had to be worked through' (ID108 F83)

Echoing Cieslik's (2014) research, themes of commitment, hard work and sacrifice characterise attitudes and approaches to intimate relationships in the MO accounts. This ongoing commitment may meet with little success, one respondent writing 'my sister-in-law become an alcoholic and yet won't admit it and we, especially my husband, have tried so hard to help' (ID58 F73). For Smart, this willingness to work on challenging relationships and help family members undermines sociological theorizing which suggests 'individuals can just walk away from unsatisfactory relationships, giving rise to the idea that people are no longer prepared to endure or work through negative relationships' (Smart 2007:134). That people are prepared to work through these difficulties highlights eudemonic themes of hard work and commitment (Vitterso 2016) while countering the reductive idea that 'in late modern society the individualised actor can always maximise personal happiness' (Smart 2007:137) because of our embeddedness in a family or relationships that actors find hard to easily exit or dismiss, a theme echoed by Cieslik's (2017) research on collaborative and co-produced happiness. Alongside 'the everyday negative feelings in relationships' (Smart 2007:135) is a recognition that the 'dark sides of relationships cannot be eliminated easily- or perhaps at all' (Smart 2007:134). A more extreme expression of family conflict is outright estrangement. Two respondents write about estrangement from their (adult) children:

'she met the man of her dreams, a teenage father of two, bankrupt, tattoos and piercings...plus he is the son of my worst enemy. His mother hit the jackpot. Our baby went over to the enemy and is quite hateful now/ her sisters have tried and tried to build bridges, to no avail. She declines any invitation to join family gatherings. It breaks my heart' (ID10 F75)

'my youngest son not having contacted me for 5 years, for no reason that I know makes me very unhappy' (ID8 F64)

In such cases, while family members may be physically separated, emotional separation is harder. These relationships live on. On the other hand, individuals who escape from difficult relationships can feel emancipated. This is true particularly of one respondent, who, in describing the start of her university study as the happiest period of her life, explains this as partly an opportunity to escape her mother's negative influence. In addition, while UK wellbeing data (ONS 2019) indicates that

divorce is one of the major sources of unhappiness, of the four respondents who self-identify as divorced, only one respondent associates this with unhappiness. Unlike bereavement, another widely attributed factor of unhappiness in social surveys, divorce was not a major theme in these accounts.

As explored in Chapter Five, the home can be a place of security; equally, it can be a site of conflict and abuse (Smart 2007). A few respondents write about their spouses in ways which signify deep unhappiness. This is particularly true for one female respondent who lives in an abusive domestic setting (my research log has the comment 'very painful to read' after encountering this response for the first time). She hints at physical abuse, but it is the emotional abuse she writes about at length. One form this takes is her partner deliberately thwarting or attacking her rare moments of happiness: 'if I have a happy day i.e. better than average and not grim, you can bet P senses it and is in a temper, a long diatribe ensues!' (ID154 F64). She enjoys watching TV documentaries but her husband 'has refused to let me see anything 'culture'.

The nuclear family unit can also be a place of serious conflict, one respondent writing 'something that makes me unhappy, and have prayed about, is harmony in the house. our three girls just don't like each other and I don't know why' (ID10 F75). Unhappiness here is accentuated by it being puzzling. As Thin (2012) suggests, what may make an experience particularly troubling is when there seems to be no reason or logic behind it, where individuals are powerless both in the sense of ameliorating the situation but also trying to make sense of it.

D. Childhood

The significance of relationality to our wellbeing lies partly in its providing so much of our (positive) self-identification; rejection can be damaging and Smart (2007:45) indicates that blood relationships in particular have these 'haunting powers'. In what she portrays as the "imaginary" realm of relational life, 'people have symbolic means, and even practices, which sustain elements of love and closeness (but also hate and bitterness)' (Smart 2007:45). A significant area of the imaginary realm which continue to haunt individuals are memories of negative childhood experiences concerning parental mistreatment, neglect or lack of care. For one respondent, decades after the event, this still matters.

'What makes me unhappy is thinking back to my childhood. Even now, a sudden memory of some of the mental cruelties my mother practised can bring tears to my eyes' (ID185 F71)

Psychological theorizing, from the psychoanalysis of Freud, the humanistic psychology of Maslow and the developmental theories of Bowlby (Dean 2009) have all emphasised the significance of the

parent-child relationship in healthy self-development. As recent research has shown (Layard et al 2013), these formative experiences matter for adult wellbeing and can have long-term effects: they are 'tenacious...because they form a poignant part of our selves' (Smart 2007:54). For some, the fragmentation of the family unit during childhood continues to resonate. Two respondents reflected on their parents' divorce as negative turning points:

'I thought about Christmas when I was 10 years old, and how much I loved it and can remember in detail opening up my presents, and it was the last Christmas we had as a family before my parents split up. In some ways, thinking about it now it is tainted by sadness not happiness, but at the same time it was carefree, innocent happiness before everything I knew changed. That still sounds rather sad. I think it says something about me that two of these 'happiest days' are in my early childhood. I do tend to look back at things, and there is a sense that it was a very difficult time from 11 onwards when my parents divorced. I still remember that day vividly, and the exact date, and the strange sense of falling and not knowing what would happen next' (ID88 F33)

'Another thing that makes me upset is that since my parents divorced when I was 8, I have had very little contact with my dad - why I am not sure' (ID179 F35)

These episodes are the flipside to the positive catalysts of long-term happiness identified in previous chapters. In the narrative metaphor, they are the millstones (as opposed to milestones) that dog the overall journey. Such enduring impacts require social scientists, according to Smart (2007:45), to recognise 'the issue of how hard it is to be free of one's family and kin...these relationships are very "sticky"; it is hard to shake free from them at an emotional level' (Smart 2007:45). To be sure, negative formative experiences are by no means irrevocably damaging even though they still contain these 'haunting' or 'sticky' qualities and 'may be slow to relinquish their grip' (Smart 2007:135). As one respondent writes:

'I have survived the trauma of my childhood and seem to have entered a period of stability. Although there are still some repercussions, I know that the worst is over' (ID182 F51)

For Furedi (2004) and Rose (1996), the 'emotional scripts' and 'feeling rules' that govern modern life encourage actors to identify and monitor their personal feelings with recourse to a growing therapeutic industry. Yet despite descriptions of trauma, very few respondents explicitly refer to having undergone therapeutic treatment. Granted, others may be deliberately omitting this information as part of a 'defended self' (Holloway 2006) individuals sometimes present as research subjects.

One branch of the therapy industry (Furedi 2004) is self-help literature, a genre that holds out the promise of happiness (Illouz 2007; Ahmed 2010). As explored in Chapter Four, respondents were able to reflect on the meaning of happiness through a range of authors, including the Dalai Lama, Oliver Burkeman, Gretchen Rubin and Deborah Devonshire. While these are marketed as self-help, these authors, in different ways, are critical of the more 'quick-fix' emotional strategies that Furedi (2004) and Davies (2015) argue are central to how happiness is being commodified and sold to the general public. Instead, they advocate happiness philosophies such as stoicism, Buddhism and eudemonia that all emphasise the normality and inevitability of unhappy emotions and negative experience, in contrast to more simplifying messages about transforming negative into positive affect.

E. Mistreatment by others

Mistreatment by others, particularly significant others, further reveals the dual or 'dark' side of intimate relationships and a recognition that their 'very importance may lie in their potentially damaging and harmful qualities...the everyday experiences of anxiety, hurt and lack of respect' (Smart 2007:137). This can be observed in one respondent's description of her husband's behaviour.

'My husband continues to be very ill, and he becomes more and more confused and frustrated. He is frequently angry and irrational, which is very distressing to me. At times, his behaviour has been appalling, and he has accused me of saying and doing bizarre things that I would never say or do...the way he behaves when he has these odd turns truly upsets me' (ID2 F57)

One way respondents described the hurt they experienced from others was how their inconsiderate behaviour led to an almost existential sense of lack- being 'forgotten about' or neglected was an important source of unhappiness. This was expressed as being let down, betrayed or taken for granted, as the following excerpts show:

'being taken for granted. Which my family do sometimes!' (ID77 F73)

'I also get unhappy if people let me down or are disloyal, for example promise or offer to do something and then don't or betray a trust' (ID89 M45)

'being let down by someone. feeling left out or that I'm missing out on something' (ID115 F31)

Human agents could be depicted as generally 'needy' in relation to validation and recognition from others because 'our relation to self is strongly influenced by our relations to others; it is hard to have

self-esteem if no-one else esteems us' (Sayer 2011:7). Several respondents wrote about being bullied or criticised and how this contributes to low self-esteem and one reason why respondents cited their workplace as a source of personal dissatisfaction was a relational dimension about lack of respect and mistreatment, particularly from managers. This echoes research about workplace wellbeing (MacLeod 2011; NEF 2012) where poor relationships with management contribute to low satisfaction at work. Two respondents locate this within a school environment:

'For three years of my teaching life I had a Head who was not in the same universe as me, she didn't operate with the children or the staff in a friendly cooperative way but demanded that her way was the only way. There was a loss of respect all round...as deputy this caused a great deal of unhappiness trying to support the staff as best as I could and attempting to remain sane...it was a very miserable time' (ID78)

'In 2012 I lost my job. I was told, with no personal prior warning or consultation, that I would be made redundant at the end of the school year, along with several of my work colleagues. By the middle of last year, the person responsible for the decision, a woman who cared nothing for the people whose lives she was shattering, was 'relieved of her duties'. I was ecstatic' (ID49 F62)

These descriptions of mistreatment are the negative 'flipside' to the positive work accounts in Chapter Six where respondents were praised and recognised for their contribution. These examples are also stories about virtues and appropriate moral conduct; in ID49's account, where the person in authority is said to 'have shattered lives', one with a satisfying conclusion where the perpetrator gets their comeuppance or just desserts. According to Thin (2012), justice is a key component of the way people narrate the meaning or significance of events and is also characteristic more generally of how happiness is often reflected upon through ethical and moral judgement about one's own, other people's or societal conduct.

These examples also link, in an Aristotelian paradigm, to the virtues and vices intrinsic to a particular practice (Sandel 2010). In ID78's account (above), the perpetrator is seen to be not only unfriendly but also un-cooperative with children and staff, the exact opposite of virtues associated with education practice and creating a positive learning environment. In another workplace example of managerial mistreatment, where the person in authority is engaged in 'bullying' and 'patronising' behaviour, this is perceived as subverting their duty of care towards subordinates, something held to be fundamental to the practice of good management.

Evaluations of conduct are grounded in a sensitivity to how others are treating us; how they do so matter (Sayer 2011; Hookway 2018). Subsequently, a great deal of detail about unhappiness associated with everyday social interaction is around themes of 'respect', 'inconsideration' or, in more serious examples, 'bullying' and 'cruelty'. In many cases, these take on a generalizing form that blur the boundaries between the personal and society-at-large. This can be seen in one respondent's list of things that make her unhappy:

'cruelty, Selfishness, lying, deceit, greed, stupidity, thoughtlessness...it's often so unnecessary and all it does is cause pain, yet people are often so quick to be unpleasant. I don't like it. It makes me unhappy' (ID98 M43)

In this case, it is not clear whether he is referring to his own experiences or general social commentary, or both. As Sayer (2004) suggests, the nature of lay normativity is that it often takes a more generalising and objective appraisal that both encompasses and transcends personal life.

Failure

Lay normativity extends to analyses about one's own behaviour and conduct, illustrating how happiness 'stands at a particular relationship to virtue' (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:1) and echoing eudemonic and stoic philosophies where ethical conduct is a key pillar of a happy life (McMahon 2013). Answering Q6 about sources of unhappiness, one respondent writes 'the obvious things: cruelty, nastiness, spitefulness, selfishness. And what really makes me unhappy is when I am guilty any of those things' (ID80 M66).

Failure in this sense is an ethical shortcoming. Guilt also dominates some of these self-critical moral evaluations. Guilt, as Sayer (2004) has written, is a particularly social emotion in being triggered when individuals feel they have hurt or mistreated others. This is often experienced as regret, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

'There are moments in my life that I would like to relive only to change how awful my behaviour was not because it was a lovely time...I regret being unpleasant to people because of how crap I felt as a person at various times in my life. I would like to apologies to some people' (ID86 F49)

This response reflects Sayer's (2011) contention that mistreatment of others often stems from one's own pain- to lash out is to deflect these feelings. In grappling with and ruminating about mistreating or upsetting others, while some respondents assert full knowledge in how their behaviour has affected others, other respondents, not having 'immediate experience' (Smith 2013:1) of how others feel instead imagine themselves into the mind of the other. This invariably causes anxiety, expressed

by several respondents as 'thinking I've upset someone' and by one respondent as 'feeling like I've offended someone makes me over-worry' (ID44 F42). Anxiety is coupled with uncertainty in these examples; we often can't be sure of how our behaviour has affected others and this 'internal conversation' (Archer 2001) can lead to secondary negative emotional states like fear of retribution (Sayer 2011).

Unsurprisingly, given the extent to which an emphasis on achievement underscored responses to personal flourishing in Chapter Six, lack of achievement can constitute an important source of unhappiness. These range from 'everyday' failures or incompetence, such as 'feeling helpless or out of my depth with a task' (ID14 F21), to more all-encompassing critical self-evaluation, as the following excerpts show:

'disliking the way you look to such an extent you hate yourself, disliking what your life has become and why your attempts to change it have failed, feeling that life is conspiring against you, seeing everyone has a couple except yourself, failure to have children' (ID4 M51)

'putting on weight, being on my own, not doing very well academically' (ID24 F21)

These quotes highlight the socialised nature of negative self-appraisal, particularly in relation to social norms. Powerful cultural discourses about the nature of a 'happy life' can be discerned in these self-criticisms: educational achievement, individual responsibility, bodily expectations and building a family. As Ahmed suggests (2010), personal happiness is implicitly about social judgement- positive status is conferred by successful conformity to a norm. They also express what Sayer (2004:10) calls, firstly, "aesthetic" shame: 'the failure to achieve valued appearances, for example in looks or clothing' and "performative" shame, 'the failure to carry out some task to an expected standard'.

The shame produced by a failure to achieve these social standards 'can be an extraordinarily powerful emotion involving endless reflection and self-condemnation' (Sayer 2004:9) as well as 'invidious comparison with others who have been done better than ourselves in competition for goods' (Sayer 2004:8). This is pernicious, in that 'the person who through no fault of their own has a despised body shape or who cannot afford fashionable clothing, has done nothing shameful, but might still feel shame. Equally, the complementary feeling of contempt may be unwarranted, if it is unrelated to any shameful or contemptible behaviour for which the despised can reasonably be held responsible' (Sayer 2004:9). The ethical distinction here is that the criteria by which ID51 writes that he dislikes how he looks 'to such an extent you hate yourself' is an aesthetic failure related to social

norms whereas the failure to treat people well is a moral shortcoming based on criteria of harm and fairness that individuals themselves positively subscribe to.

The sense of “aesthetic” shame which refers to social scripts about desirable body shapes can be viewed through over 20 respondents who cite their body, and in particular, being overweight, as key sources of unhappiness:

‘Sometimes I get frustrated by my own inadequacies- the greed or obsession with food which means I could easily gain weight’ (ID165 F67)

‘I make myself unhappy by drinking too much and eating bad food and then feeling fat...I know perfectly well that I am happier when I'm feeling in control of my body and my appetites, but I still give in to these self-destructive urges’(ID128 F44)

‘putting on weight (or the fear of putting it on)’ (ID167 F33)

Given that all of these quotes are from female respondents, these self-critical narratives about the body, and in particular, the rather hectoring tone of ID28’s self-evaluation, can be viewed through a feminist paradigm of the pressures that women face to conform to idealised cultural norms (Ahmed 2010). Another gendered aspect of happiness scripts which could be seen as reinforcing powerful social mores focuses on the need to find a partner and have children (Walby 1990). Here two female respondents lament their failure to achieve this:

‘I have to admit being single makes me unhappy. when I'm working being single doesn't seem so bad as I'm always so busy. I literally get home, eat, mark and go to bed. However, as soon as I'm off on holiday I look around and realise how lonely I am. I have friends but I would like to have someone in my life...it can all be pretty miserable and frustrating especially when all your friends are now married. I worry about the future and how I really don't want to spend the rest of my life alone’ (ID6 F)

‘Day to day, I am unhappy with where I am in life at the moment...I would dearly love a partner in life, but I really don't know if I will be lucky enough to meet the man of my dreams! I feel unhappy about that when I am in a situation where there are lots of couples and happy families around me’ (ID151 F49)

It may be tempting to analyse these sentiments, particularly statements like ‘man of my dreams’, as ones driven by powerful social discourses, as sociological accounts of emotions (e.g. Barbalet 2002) have emphasised. However, this might obscure how feeling ashamed ‘at not living up to a perceived social norm...is often because we ourselves have come to believe it as something worth valuing- not

because of its societal force' (Sayer 2004:8-9). While this undeniably involves 'some form of internalisation of external norms and expectations' (Sayer 2004:9), an over-socialised view of what people aim for neglects the intrinsic motivations or positive goods associated with say, being a parent and why individuals pursue these goals. Relationships, as ID6 reflects, can also mitigate against loneliness, a key driver of unhappiness in UK wellbeing data (ONS 2019). Therefore, social discourses about subjects like happiness 'may give people scripts, but people can care about some parts of these scripts and feel indifferent about others according to how they bear upon their wellbeing; they are not merely programmed by discourses' (Sayer 2004:10-11).

McMahon (2006) argues that it would be hard to escape what ID88 terms 'a feeling of failure in the modern world' when expectations are raised so high: 'the prospect of perpetual pleasure means that those in the west are saturated by the smiling images of "real" people enjoying themselves eternally, as is their right...only reinforces the real sadness, guilt and sense of inadequacy felt by those who cannot find it in themselves to share in the mirth' (McMahon 2006:464). The pressure placed on individuals to fulfil their 'promise of happiness' (Ahmed 2010) and the dissonance between heightened aspirations and means to achieve these creates a paradox, in that anxiety becomes an inevitable side-product of a society that promotes happiness. As one respondent puts it, 'worry and stress make me unhappy...both seem to be an unavoidable reality of modern-day life' (ID120).

Another explores these feelings of failure:

'Getting bogged down in 'life admin' and the pursuit of-some kind of domestic dream (which taps into feelings of inadequacy or a feeling a failure in the modern world) ...sense of frustration at not having accomplished something or achieved - or even adequately pursued so-called 'dreams' (ID88 F61)

The moderate happiness prescribed by Epicurus (2013), echoed by many respondents' perceptions of happiness in Chapter Four, is one where goals are adjusted and revised in accordance with one's capacity to achieve them: by 'restricting the number of our total wants, we help ensure our ability to satisfy them' (McMahon 2006:57). But prudence and self-restraint is set against the backdrop of a society 'where the orientation towards the good becomes a form of pressure in a world in which the good cannot possibly exhaust the realm of possibility' (Ahmed 2010:131). Writing over a century previously, Emile Durkheim (1990:174) suggested that 'no living being can be happy unless his needs are adequately related to his means' but claimed that in modern, affluent societies no limits would be set on what constituted a need and when 'all goals are in infinity', to pursue goals which are 'by definition unattainable is to condemn oneself to a state of perpetual unhappiness' (Durkheim 1990:175).

Making happiness a personal responsibility when ‘all goals are in infinity’ (Durkheim 1990:175) not only increases the pressure on individuals but is likely to foster feelings of powerlessness. This sense of powerlessness I coded and categorised as ‘lacking autonomy’ and was an unhappiness factor for around 10% of the cohort. This emphasis on (lack of) autonomy and its key role in wellbeing (Ryff & Singer 2008; Alkire 2015) is captured by one respondent’s comment that ‘lack of control is at the heart of everything that makes me unhappy’ (ID63 F48).

Feelings of failure and of being unable to exert control over one’s circumstances further highlights the precarious nature of wellbeing: if, as the previous chapter suggested, achievement and meaning are important motivators, then the pursuit of these things is risky: as much as things can go well, they can go badly. In this sense, self-respect is perhaps the positive flipside of shame (Sayer 2011), in that the very domains that gave respondents such satisfaction and fulfilment are also the ones that actors feel most distressed about. In the pursuit of wellbeing ‘actors continually seek out situations where they risk contempt and hence shame, in order to win respect, implying that unless we take such risks, we shall achieve little respect or self-respect’ (Sayer 2011:32).

Social structures ensure that there is no level-playing field- it is easier for some to achieve a life they value than others by virtue of their social position and the way resources are unequally distributed (Deeming 2013). But however much individual effort is over-emphasised and valorised in contemporary society (Dean 2009), in practice actors tend to portray themselves as responsible for their successes and failures. This may be why many of the responses to Q5 about reliving happiest days are re-imagined as opportunities to correct mistakes, make different choices, forge other pursuits, leave certain relationships and, it is implied, lead a happier life than the ones they are currently experiencing:

‘the only days I have ever wished I could re-live are those where I messed up - where I fouled up a relationship, where I missed a chance, where I failed to focus or push for something that meant a lot to me’ (ID80 M66)

(non) Engagement with Unhappiness

As evidenced by the reflections on failure, the willingness of respondents to acknowledge unhappiness in their lives, and in some cases to describe and dwell on these at length, provide something of a counter-narrative to sociological theories (e.g Furedi 2004; Rose 1996) about how individuals in modernity perform technologies on their selves (Hyman 2011) to banish or obscure negative feelings. That being said, more respondents chose not to respond to Q6 about unhappiness than Q2 about happiness and one possible explanation for this a wish to avoid the subject.

The way 'anxiety and its related defences are part of the human condition' (Holloway 2006:545) signify a problem in social research whereby individuals deflect pain and defend the self against difficult emotions like anxiety or feelings of failure. This 'defended self' might explain why around a fifth of the cohort chose not to respond to Q6. But it is also made explicit by some of those who did respond. As one respondent comments, 'lots of things make me unhappy but I do denial quite nicely, so won't go into them here!' (ID119 F34).

This avoidance of negative feelings because, as another respondent states, 'I don't want to destroy my good mood!' (ID134 M36) echoes Furedi's (2004) theorizing and Hyman's (2014) empirical happiness work concerning a "Therapeutic Discourse" whereby individuals are governed by the desire to accentuate positive feelings and eliminate negative and troubling emotions. Thus, difficult emotions can be flagged but then sublimated or, through 'a technology of self-production' (Ahmed 2010), directed towards positivity. This can be observed in the following responses:

'I can be lonely at times, and that makes me regret not having someone to share my life with. But I try not to dwell on this too much - thinking I am unhappy makes me...unhappy! So I try to make sure that what I do makes me happy!' (ID200 M28)

'transforming the situation- If something is making me unhappy I try to find a way to change the situation to my advantage so that I am no longer unhappy' (ID133 F41)

Another tendency is for respondents to deploy rhetorical devices to "shut-down" the subject of unhappiness, one respondent stating 'I could come up with more but depression and gloom enough' (ID4 M51). Yet this may also be connected to the fact that Q6 is the final question of the directive. Through 'narrative consciousness' (Thin 2012:326), respondents may want to end the account on an upbeat or positive note. As Thin details, even "misery-lit" biographies generally adopt a style of the happy or at least more upbeat ending. In this way, suffering and trauma become meaningful by the prospect of a happier future.

Another narrative technique adopted by respondents is to express gratitude that their lives, however personally unhappy, are still more fortunate than others. This act of partial self-effacement links to the "moderation/modesty" happiness perspective explored in Chapter Four where personal concerns and experiences are viewed in their wider context. As one respondent put it, 'at the end of the day there are people worse off than me, so I can't complain' (ID66 F42).

Social Context

In the eudemonic tradition, a happy life is dependent upon favourable social conditions. In its pursuit, an individual is 'more like a plant than a jewel: something rather fragile' (Nussbaum

1989:476 in Burkeman 2012:99) that needs the right conditions to help it grow. In the UK, a lack of access to a variety of social goods deemed necessary to lead a dignified and fulfilling life (Dean 2009) are directly associated with unhappiness. In the latest UK national wellbeing report (ONS 2019), being unemployed, disabled, having poor mental health and living in households with less disposable income capacity are all positively correlated with lower rates of self-reported happiness. For the 20 respondents who are 'struggling' through these factors, their unhappiness is framed in the wider contexts of service provision, socio-economic conditions and policy choices (Wilkinson & Pickett 2010; Institute of Health Equity 2009).

While one of the mainstays of happiness research is that money may not make you happy above a certain level (Layard 2011), it is equally the case that insufficient income is a key predictor of unhappiness (Lelkes 2013). The respondents who linked unhappiness with finances could be categorised in two ways. First, low level but ongoing worry about sufficient income. This can be seen in two examples of respondents monitoring and worrying about their financial situation:

'the thought of having no money is something terrifies me so I always feel happy and safe whenever I top up my account' (ID25 F27)

'I spend so much time worrying about bills that it's always a sense of relief and sheer happiness when I've paid one or when I log onto my bank and see all my direct debits have been paid and I have a little money left' (ID130 F41)

These accounts were written in 2013/14, a period of higher cost of living and depressed wages, when, exacerbating the effects of the 2008 recession, the negative social impacts of state-imposed austerity programme of reduction in social spending were being felt in the UK (Loopstra 2015). Although these negative impacts mostly fell on already disadvantaged groups (Stuckler et al 2017), a phrase popularised by then Labour opposition leader Ed Miliband, the 'squeezed middle', captured a situation where for working households it had 'become harder to live a comfortable life on a modest or even typical income in modern Britain' (Resolution Foundation 2014:2). This was tracked by happiness data which, in the years 2012-2014, were showing higher rates of anxiety and individuals struggling to get by financially (ONS 2019).

The second category of respondents whose unhappiness links to income are those living below the poverty line. In 2013-14, state-imposed austerity measures led to worsening rates of mental health, higher unemployment, homelessness and food insecurity (Stuckler et al 2017) and the situation for already disadvantaged groups was particularly precarious (Standing 2014; Loopstra 2015; Barr 2016).

One disabled respondent describes his experiences living in substandard housing without the means to pay for basic utilities:

‘I suppose what would make me happy is living in a house that isn't leaking, that's warm and has some luxuries like furniture...at the moment I would be happy to have a central heating boiler that worked seeing as mine broke down on Christmas Eve and it is now April...try spending a winter without heating or hot water and on top of that with such a wet winter all my bedrooms seem to have damp problems so I am living in my small kitchen which is the only warm room in the house’ (ID82 M62)

A similar narrative is provided by one unemployed respondent who, in response to Q5 about imagining future happiness, wishes for ‘a really nice home...I'm sick of cleaning up the mess every time it rains, it's so cold and damp here so I'd like a nice warm place to live’ (ID170 F61). According to the UK wellbeing index (ONS 2019), unemployment is one of three key predictors of low wellbeing. As explored in Chapter Three, only three respondents self-identified as unemployed. From one of these, a source of unhappiness is ‘living below the poverty line...subsistence level’ (ID4 M51). A respondent from Scotland offers some insight into the various factors that make unemployment and unhappiness so entwined:

‘It is tough enough to balance budgets when you live on benefits, but it doesn't get much better when you have to jump through hoops to get your benefits -or face the risk of them being cut’ (ID48 F32)

In relating the indignity of unemployment, this respondent captures the social policy context of 2013/14 of a punitive benefits system where receipt of Job Seekers allowance was increasingly conditional on performance against a raft of targets, including number of applications written, hours spent searching for jobs and employability training (Stuckler et al 2017). Or, as ID48 calls it, ‘jumping through hoops’. This respondent also lacks confidence in her own abilities and feels unable to exert control over her circumstances. A vicious cycle of shame, powerlessness and lack of achievement ensues:

‘I hate the feeling of helplessness and hopelessness as well, I've been feeling those recently. I lack belief and motivation and discipline, so little odd jobs take all day to be done. I don't believe in my own skills so adverts for jobs sound like things I can't do, I don't have enough confidence and optimism and I hate that, so I don't do things, and feel bad for not having done them -then I feel bad and doubt that I'll do something after that. It's a bad circle to be in. That makes me unhappy’ (ID48 F32)

What this insight into the struggles of unemployment provides is to see how unhappiness operates, not just in terms of the 'simplifying causal factors' (Thin 2012:324) presented in quantitative studies but through multiple, intersecting factors: unemployment, poverty, mistreatment, self-criticism and a lack of control over one's circumstances, that are hard to disentangle and where psychological, material and societal drivers interact. This case also shows how the subjective and objective elements of wellbeing are linked; while she describes the interiority of this experience, it is also socially contingent. To some degree we are dependent on wider social structures to meet our wellbeing needs (Dean 2009) and Social Policy scholars (e.g. Manning 2008; Alcock 2010) have noted the tendency of contemporary discourse to overplay the capacity of individuals to direct their own lives in conditions largely beyond their control.

Other insights into the relationship between unemployment and unhappiness is provided by the multiple temporal perspectives that the respondents position themselves in. One remembers a time in her early twenties when she and her future husband were unable to get a job:

'we had been unemployed, which is a terrible situation in which to be. Everyone, whether it is family members or friends, or anyone at all in fact, will not stop banging on about finding a job and how one is wasting one's life in unemployment, as if it were a condition that had been chosen' (ID2 F57)

Here the social stigma and shame of unemployment is powerfully captured, particularly how it is reframed as the responsibility of individuals, as if, ID2 tells us, unemployment 'were a condition that had been chosen'. That these external judgements are being made by her peers reflects how in the last 40 years public attitudes towards the unemployed and other social groups accessing welfare have become much less tolerant, inclined to see unemployment as the fault of the unemployed (BSAS 2019). The reformulation of a social phenomenon into a personal deficit also chimes with the individualisation thesis (Bauman 2001) which suggests that individuals have become responsibilised with transforming their own situation in the context of the erosion of social safety nets established after the Second World War (Manning 2008).

Poor health, physical and mental, is another key predictor of low wellbeing (ONS 2019). In the UK data suggests that a quarter of UK adults will experience poor mental health at some stage of their life (ONS 2019). This problem is illustrated in the accounts where depression and anxiety are reflected on as sources of unhappiness, as the following two excerpts show:

'This is an odd subject for me because my first reply to the question What makes me happy? Is Prozac. It's not that taking daily fluoxetine in itself makes me happy, of course, but it lets

me step out of the deadening mists of depression and allow life to make me happy' (ID105 F51)

'I long for happiness, especially as I have been depressed for much of my life. So it means a great deal to me' (ID113 M26)

ID105's comments show why health conditions are socially implicated because treatment requires effective and accessible services. This is also the case for the 10 respondents who are suffering from an ongoing physical illness or disability that make wellbeing a matter of personal struggle. The physical constraint of their condition and in some cases dependency on medication and care demonstrates both the significance of public services and how ill health thwarts personal autonomy:

'Being unhappy means having to be dependent upon doctors' prescriptions in order to live every day. Enabling my life carry on because of daily injections does make me extremely unhappy daily' (ID71 F59)

'When I was a student before I became chronically sick and disabled... at the age of 25 I was suddenly struck down with severe rheumatoid arthritis.....We were able to continue to attend university to get our PhDs, but by that time I was not fit to work. I became very severely disabled, and my husband had to give up work as an associate lecturer to become my full-time carer' (ID2 F57)

ID2's response highlights how personal ambitions can be stymied, often in sudden ways. A life full of potential is changed indelibly by a health condition that impacts not only on the narrator but also their partner. In addition, chronic and ongoing pain makes respondents with health problems unhappy. As explored in Chapter Four, 'ataraxia' or freedom from suffering is the cornerstone of epicurean happiness (O'Keefe 2013) and this is echoed by two respondents who write that future happiness would mean freedom from pain.

'Pain makes me unhappy. I have a lot of it (spinal arthritis) and so I take a lot of painkillers. They don't entirely work, So I have to grab my moments of happiness when they come' (ID105 F51)

'I certainly have days when I have a lot of physical pain due to my disabilities, and I can get very low. I would class myself as unhappy on those days' (ID151 F49)

Summary

Key causes of unhappiness explored in this chapter –loss, conflict, failure, regret, mistreatment –can to some degree be considered as the negative flipside to the sources of positive happiness identified

in Chapters Five and Six, highlighting the vulnerability of agents to flourish in domains where things can go well or badly through their own fallibility, how others treat them or just 'brute bad luck' (Wolff 2008). Other struggles pertaining to unemployment, poor health and substandard accommodation demonstrate both the significance of social structures and the limits of individual control. Equally, the subjective feelings associated with these struggles, including shame, anxiety, failure and low self-esteem, are aspects of interior, psychological life that are also at least to some degree socially constructed because they relate to how 'individuals conform to external judgements and norms' (Sayer 2004:8) and the failure to live up to these social expectations.

However, as Sayer (2004:10) points out, often 'the negative feeling of shame is dependent on a positive valuation of the behaviours, ideals or principles in question'. If shame and failure were all socially produced, then only extrinsic motivations would matter, and actors would be incapable of coming up with plausible explanations as to why they desire certain goods or roles and not others (Sayer 2007); that they are capable of doing so is illustrated in the ways actors creatively and critically engage with powerful social norms, including the possibility that while some, like parenting, can be (though certainly not uniformly) valued positively, others, like wealth accumulation, are not.

In conceptual terms, a lay normative stance (Hookway 2018) about the nature of unhappiness as something unavoidable whose existence should be acknowledged and accepted, was also identified. Though some accounts reflect Hyman's (2014) analysis of how individuals perform a 'technology of the self' to rid themselves of negative emotions, in the main, respondents are willing to acknowledge their struggles, pains and indignities in ways that appear to counter some of the more pessimistic sociological theorizing of writers like Furedi (2004) and Rose (1996) about individuals presenting a relentlessly positive disposition.

The scope of unhappiness can also transcend personal concerns. Though this sensitivity to how others are flourishing is mostly limited to close, personal relationships, concern for the wellbeing of others can spill over into a more generalized domain of 'humanity' (Haidt 2012). The extent to which respondents locate ideas about happiness as part of wider social concerns and are able to analyse the subject of happiness or unhappiness in relation to what might constitute general or social wellbeing forms the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Eight: Social Unhappiness

This chapter focuses on one significant finding of the analysis: the social and political dimensions of accounts about unhappiness, incorporating disaffection with political structures and narratives of national decline (Hookway 2018). In their responses, when individuals explored positive sources of happiness, they did so mostly in terms of their personal life, only around 10% linked this to wider political and social contexts. Conversely, when exploring unhappiness, around half the cohort made explicit social commentary a part of their response.

That responses broadened to a wider narrative about socio-cultural and political practices and general wellbeing was unexpected, partly because in survey research individual (un)happiness is assumed to relate to an evaluation of a range of personal wellbeing domains as opposed to wider social concerns (Thin 2012; Pavot & Diener 2013) and partly because the panel participants were not prompted to include a social dimension as part of their responses. However, as explored in Chapter Three, a noted feature of the archive is the way that it generates unsolicited social commentary from respondents 'speaking about social experience in the context of everyday politics, reflections on public attitudes and beyond' (Pollen 2013:223).

Echoing findings of recent qualitative studies (Cieslik 2017; Hyman 2014), many respondents depict happiness as a relational and collaborative activity involving significant others, highlighted in chapters Five and Seven. Their social concern can also override these parochial domains and implies a more socially embedded human agent than is often depicted both in quantitative happiness research and sociological critiques of happiness studies (Cieslik 2014).

Political Alienation and Dissatisfaction

One significant dimension of "social unhappiness" was how respondents were often politically engaged as "concerned citizens" while expressing strong disaffection with existing political structures. This chimes with a concept developed in recent decades about how a "democratic deficit", defined as a 'crisis of legitimacy in Western democratic states' (Norris 2012:2) has emerged. This is characterised by growing distrust and disillusionment with political structures and feelings that people no longer 'have a voice in their national conversation' (Eatwell & Goodwin 2018:xxi). This disaffection is believed to have been a key driver of rises in populism and electoral moments that have 'disrupted the politics of many Western societies' (Norris & Inglehart 2016:1) including the 2016 UK EU Referendum and Trump election in the USA. Though written before these seismic events, MO respondents' dissatisfaction with the political system captures what Norris & Inglehart (2016:14) see as the phenomenon of citizens becoming 'more critical towards established political

institutions and authorities'. This is particularly reflected through critical commentary about politicians. One respondent, at 94 the oldest in the participant panel, in response to Q6 of the directive, 'is there anything that makes you unhappy? encapsulates this general disaffection:

'I get unhappy about the general state of this country, our self-seeking incompetent MPs, about the government who seem unable to get this country back to rights (any government of any colour), with their corrupt and hypocritical attitudes' (ID64 M94)

Another respondent, a retired shop assistant from Hull, also criticises 'politicians who promise so much and then go back on their word as soon as they are elected' (ID92 F81) while a Senior NHS pharmacist, laments politicians who 'don't use their power responsibly' (ID182 F51). These comments show respondents from different ages and occupational backgrounds sharing feelings of mistrust and disaffection with politicians and mirror findings of declining lack of trust in UK political structures (EU Barometer 2018), with less than 20% of the UK population saying they trust politicians (Ipsos Mori 2017).

However, incompetence and ineptitude are the most frequent criticism of politicians and institutions, with respondents variously alluding to the 'folly', 'stupidity' and 'idiocy' of politicians. These judgements can be seen to reflect a key plank of sociological theorizing that Hookman (2018) labels a 'narrative of decline', a perception that national political institutions are incapable of protecting citizens against social, economic and environmental risks (Bauman 2001). As Thake (2008:3) puts it, 'we are experiencing levels of technological change, shifts in economic power and alterations in environmental conditions that have overwhelmed the institutions tasked with the responsibility of protecting society from their negative impacts' which, in turn, serves to increase public disenchantment with political institutions.

Within Happiness Studies, the link between politics and happiness is under-explored. Although quantitative research (UNSDN 2019) attempts to establish a causal link between social and political structures and individual wellbeing, the methodology of identifying positive correlations 'consisting simply of regular associations of events and variables' (May 2008:9) produce little insight into the way individuals themselves establish these links and the meanings behind them.

One possible link between politics and happiness is national identity. Interest in national politics suggests a strong sense of belonging and attachment to the institutional life of a country (Skey 2011). After all, 'government institutions and policies set the stages on which lives are lived' (Helliwell et al 2019) and they do so partly in the way they 'guarantee political rights and provide access to a range of social benefits' (Skey 2013:86) but also how they generate 'a familiar pattern of

regions, locales, institutions and everyday fixtures that locate people in stable networks of relationships, objects and spaces' (Edensor 2006:532 in Skey 2013:86). Skey's (2013:85) research on national belonging and identity illustrates that since 'the ordered reality of the everyday realm' is mediated by a range of institutions, legislation, rules, service provision, officialdom and other manifestations of Government and the state, institutional arrangements 'underpin complex social systems that large numbers can rely on' (Skey 2013:85) and help to generate 'an ongoing, and consistent sense of social reality, which, in turn, may underpin a more secure sense of identity' (Skey 2013:82).

In terms of identifying a 'British' national flavour to this connection, while, as Colls (2011:589) notes, 'politics is central' to all constructions of national identity, a range of scholars agree that 'British identity' is particularly germane at the institutional level of the state (Langlands 1999; Colls 2011; Cohen 2000; Skey 2011). This is because 'Great Britain' and 'UK' are political constructions created by unifying English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish nations. Therefore, self-identification as "British" is likely to operate at 'the level of formal citizenship' (Cohen 2000:582) rather than 'by any ethno-cultural homogeneity' (Langlands 1999:63). Constituted by a shared belonging to a set of political and institutional practices, 'Britishness should be approached as an allegiance that is held in addition to – rather than instead of- often intense ethnic loyalties of the state's inhabitants' (Langlands 1999:64).

Unhappiness, Left and Right

The respondents also situated unhappiness with politics on an ideological spectrum. Predominantly, this took the form of a "left/liberal" political position, which considers 'that society is too unequal and that the government should endeavour to make it less so through, for example, higher taxation, more generous welfare benefits, the provision of public services and tighter regulation of the economy' (Curtice 2018:88).

On one level this is surprising given the demographics of the respondent cohort (explored in Chapter Three). Almost half of the cohort are over the age of 60, almost three quarters live in non-urban areas, and the sample is weighted towards the South of England, all factors consistent with voting Conservative (Curtice 2018). On the other hand, almost half of the MOP panel are currently or were (pre-retirement) working in Public Sector occupations, a factor more consistent with voting Labour (Curtice 2018). The implication of this, that many respondents are anomalies in their areas of residence, subscribing to "left/liberal" beliefs in predominantly "right/Conservative" locations, is something explicitly reflected upon by one respondent when writing about his vision of future

happiness which entails ‘not being stuck in the Home Counties forever (where being a socialist, vegan, atheist and environmentalist puts you in a minority))’ (ID164 M25).

Another respondent declares herself ‘a socialist at heart’ (ID5 F39). For a Fundraising Manager from Leeds, things that makes her unhappy are the ‘Tories’ and ‘people who vote for the Tories’ (ID29 F33) while for another respondent a source of happiness is ‘when I read or see on TV any lampooning or criticism of the Tories’ (ID194 M72). He goes on to explain why: ‘they are so arrogant and privileged and bent on the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer’. This indicates a core principle of “left” ideology- a desire for greater levels of social equality (Norris & Inglehart 2016).

The issue of equality links to one contribution survey research has made in linking happiness with political beliefs, an identified paradox about the relative happiness levels of those who self-identify with competing ideological perspectives. While more “liberal” countries (like the UK) have higher than average scores of self-reported Life-Satisfaction, within these societies, individuals who hold “Conservative” values tend to report higher levels of Life-Satisfaction than Liberals (Okulicz-Kozaryn & Avery 2014; Napier 2008). The wider narratives and responses of this liberal/left group gave no indication that their lives were any unhappier than the cohort as a whole¹⁸. But one explanation for the paradox (Okulicz-Kozaryn & Avery 2014), that conservatives, unlike liberals, are able to rationalise the social inequalities that are increasing in Western democracies like the UK (Wilkinson & Pickett 2010; Dorling 2012) could be said to have been reflected in the accounts insofar as respondents writing from a liberal/left perspective attributed inequality as an important source of unhappiness. One respondent is indicative of this in declaring that ‘inequalities wrangle with me’ (ID5 F39) while another states that ‘injustice, in all its forms, makes me unhappy. Inequality saddens me’ (ID33 M70).

While the link between inequality and happiness has been explored in a range of studies (Wilkinson & Pickett 2010; Deeming 2013), the causal connections are assumed to impact at the level of individual life satisfaction. However, the previous comments demonstrate a more social conception of happiness and wellbeing that transcend personal circumstances. Reflecting on the social conditions conducive for greater levels of societal happiness and wellbeing could also signify a thicker depiction of personhood whereby people adopt social roles as public citizens as well as private individuals (MacIntyre 1981). However, the way happiness is conceptualised and operationalised by survey research means that, on the one hand, happiness is presumed to relate to a self-interested, individualistic pursuit that neglects concerns about what subjects are happy and unhappy about in their society, and, on the other, reduces the concept of ‘national’ wellbeing to an

¹⁸ Bearing in mind there are no self-ratings in the responses

aggregate of individual self-reports. This obscures the ways in which individuals may make a distinction between what is good for them and what is good for society as a whole, a point emphasised by the ONS' (2011) own consultation into measuring national wellbeing in the UK. This showed some common themes emerging as priorities for increasing national wellbeing including 'the common feeling that there should be a greater sense of fairness and equality'. Other research (Dolan 2011; Action for Happiness 2014) also showed evidence of lay perspectives that equated greater equality with general wellbeing.

The Social Psychologist Jonathan Haidt's (2012) Moral Foundations Theory and its application in public political discourse was useful in understanding these normative appraisals of social wellbeing. According to Haidt, three sets of 'cognitive modules': harm to individuals, oppression by powerful groups and unfairness in the allocation of social goods, characterise liberal/left morality. For one respondent, oppressive, unfair and harmful features of socio-economic structures and inequality takes on an internationalist dimension:

'Day to day I have nothing to complain about, we live in a theme park life - TV, computers, entertainment on tap, a car to travel with, places to see and exercise in. It's the fact that that isn't shared by everyone, and that my life impacts on others in order for me to have the life I live. It pains me that so much that we have in the West is 'cheap'. Everyone loves a bargain. Really? Who pays for that?' (ID42 M47)

His comments show how liberal/left perspectives can take on a more cosmopolitan (Inglehart & Norris 2016) and global dimension connected to ideas of Fair Trade, ethical consumerism and the price paid by poorer nations for Western affluence (Hutton 2003). The link to wellbeing is the implication that happiness for some is gained at the expense of others. In addition, as explored in Chapter Seven, for those within the left/liberal cohort, added potency was provided by the particular context in which the responses were written, during the Coalition Government's austerity measures (Stuckler et al 2017). Their responses stress how these policies were causing harm and suffering. As one respondent put it:

'The coalition government and their ideological drive to make the poor poorer and feel completely useless is something I abhor and it makes me unhappy. I can't understand how some people see people from disadvantaged backgrounds as being undeserving, it makes me unhappy to see powerless people being held to account for the social disadvantage they face' (ID169 F32)

For her, exacerbating material lack experienced by disadvantaged groups is the associated social shaming they face 'as being underserving'. As Haidt (2012) suggests, a key feature of moral evaluations of unfairness is proportionality- the principle that merit or blame be distributed according to what people deserve. Injustice in this case is not only that welfare recipients are powerless victims of an 'ideological drive' but also that they are fundamentally underserving of contempt as this is 'unrelated to any...contemptible behaviour for which the despised can reasonably be held responsible' (Sayer 2004:9).

Other disadvantaged/minority groups for whom those adopting 'liberal/left' perspectives express concern for include refugees and immigrants, single mothers, LGBT individuals, ethnic minorities and Palestinians, all examples of groups that trigger the "oppression" moral foundation (Haidt 2012) of protecting the vulnerable against the powerful. Another way the values of the liberal/left cohort were threatened was the perceived destruction of cherished institutions, one respondent despairing at the Coalition Government's 'destruction of the welfare state and NHS'. In his exploration of moral emotions, Haidt (2012:174) identifies a 'psychology of sacredness...people treat objects, places, people and principles as though they were of infinite value'. This may explain why attachment to certain public institutions and social goods can be expressed in such forceful emotional language. For one respondent, a mature student, what constitutes a 'special torment' is 'watching the foundation of social care, education, employment etc being dismantled in my lifetime' (ID63 F48).

This idea of degradation is significant in understanding how external circumstances impact upon personal wellbeing even when they appear to have no direct relationship to personal self-interest. As Sayer (2011:1) affirms, 'well-being depends at least in part on how things that people care about – significant others, practices, objects, political causes – are faring, and on how others are treating them'. Consequently, people's evaluation of their own wellbeing depends at least in part on the flourishing of their commitments (Sayer 2011; Haidt 2012).

Indeed, given the political context in which they were writing, one way of understanding why unhappiness is mediated so strongly by social factors for the left/liberal cohort is the way in which the dominant political narratives and policies of austerity were at odds with their ideological beliefs, if happiness partly relates to the values and meanings individual hold dear (Ryff & Singer 2008; Tiberius 2013). If national belonging matters (Skey 2011), then this opposition is likely to undermine any psychological benefits derived from self-identification with a wider, collective entity. Also, anger at the way Government policies are stigmatising particular groups shows how claims about national identity are contested questions of legitimacy about who should be eligible/ineligible for state support (Skey 2011).

Left/liberal perspectives don't completely dominate these accounts. A few respondents made links between politics and unhappiness that seemed to fit "Conservative, Right" (Curtice 2018) positions in relation to immigration, welfare and support for traditional moral codes (Haidt 2012). These respondents were older and may highlight an increasing generational divide in UK politics (Curtice 2018; Norris & Inglehart 2016) where allegiance with right/conservative political parties are associated with older voters. For example, one tenet of right/conservative ideology is a concern that an overly interventionist state is creating welfare dependency and worklessness (Curtice 2018); one 70 years old respondent from Milton Keynes bemoans 'the total lack of commitment to work that seems so prevalent nowadays' (ID139 F70).

Another pillar of right/conservative ideology is concern at the erosion of traditional moral codes and institutions (Curtice 2018). This is a source of unhappiness for one respondent, a retired Civil Servant from Surrey and at 94 the joint oldest in the panel, concerned about what he calls 'the deterioration of our country':

'the dreadful obscenity in so called comedy on television, the endless emphasis on sex in so many news items, the breakdown of so many marriages, the loose sexual morality of so many children and young people and the deterioration of the Christian faith in the UK' (ID68 M94)

According to Haidt (2012), conservative morality, like liberal morality, is also invested in sacralising goods and practices, but this tends to be expressed through more authoritarian and communitarian ideals regarding obligations and loyalties of individuals to traditional moral codes and social institutions including, as expressed by ID68, sexual practices, religious teaching, marriage and language. One older female respondent also says she gets 'very unhappy about the filthy language that has infected our society and the obsession with sex everywhere' (ID139 F70). Here, wellbeing appraisals shifts from concern to harm of individuals and more to that of the integrity of an identified community or group.

Linked to this, Curtice (2018;89) notes that social conservatives 'are personally more comfortable living in a relatively homogenous society' which can imply a nationalistic and nativist concept of bounded community. As Haidt (2012) acknowledges, this has a potentially oppressive side in it being defined and expressed in opposition to the other, particularly foreigners and other outsiders perceived to threaten group solidarities and norms. ID68, for example, is unhappy about 'mass immigration which seems to go unchecked'. A retired Care Worker from Leicester, the most ethnically diverse city in the UK (ONS 2020), expresses these nativist sentiments through alienation: 'what has happened to my city- the place I was born in and grew up in, is so different. I'm a stranger

in my own city- so many foreigners all living in their own ghettos or enclaves and not mixing' (ID52 F67).

The implication here is that by 'not mixing', foreigners are falling short of the communitarian obligations required to produce a cohesive moral community (Etzioni 1998). Her comments also reflect anti-immigration attitudes which, although associated with right/conservative politics, have become increasingly popular in the UK over recent years (BSAS 2019). This is captured in a poll examining public attitudes of EU member countries (ONS 2018). In 2016, asked to identify the key problems facing their country, amongst a range of options including housing, health and social care and poverty, immigration emerged as the top concern for UK respondents (ONS 2019).

From this perspective, one source of unhappiness is a concern that the core values and rights of the majority 'ethno-cultural' (Langlands 1999) group is being superseded. When the 'assumption of majority precedence' (Colls 2000:584) is threatened, one response are 'claims to indigenism, or the idea that "this is our nation" and that "we deserve to be in control"' (Kaufman 2004:2 in Skey 2013:89). Hage's (1998) concept of "national cultural capital" is one where some are 'perceived to be and treated as if they are more or less national than others because they possess particular characteristics (skin, colour, accent) and/or competencies (knowledge, practical skills, taste)' (Hage 1998:53). One way this is mobilised is to de-legitimise immigrant groups claims to rights based on behaviour that is seen to act against established norms. For example, one respondent criticises foreigners 'who yack, yack, yack loudly and continuously and immigrants talking loudly on their phone' (ID52 F67). This relates to what Skey (2010) terms 'the undomesticated other', outsiders who don't play by the established rules.

However, it is too simplistic to depict respondent unhappiness about politics and society in terms of an ideological split between left/liberals and older conservatives -the synergies can often be as telling as the distinctions. In examining voting patterns in the 2016 EU referendum and 2017 UK General election, Curtice (2018:89) identifies an orthogonal trend where running parallel to but also overlaying traditional left/right division is 'a cultural cleavage between, on the one hand, libertarians or social liberals, those who feel that people should be free to choose the moral code that they follow and the social mores that they respect, and are comfortable living in a diverse, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic society, and, on the other, authoritarians or social conservatives inclined to the view that society needs to encourage and enforce common moral codes, social mores and linguistic practices as a way of promoting social cohesion'.

As Curtice is at pains to point out, 'the libertarian-authoritarian division in Conservative and Labour support exists alongside the traditional 'left-right' division rather than displacing it' (Curtice

2018:89). However, the 'cultural cleavage' dividing social liberals and authoritarians that runs parallel to but also cuts across traditional left/right distinctions is a way of understanding the nuances of the way MO respondents associate unhappiness with politics. This is illustrated by the fact that none of the three "conservative" respondents quoted above make any political commentary that aligns with "right" ideology connected to generating economic growth and wealth creation and cutting state expenditure (Curtice 2018:88-89). ID64, who earlier expressed a range of "conservative" concerns over moral decline, transcends partisanship in his critique about 'the government who seem unable to get this country back to rights (any government of any colour)' (ID64 M94).

Furthermore, many of the left/liberal cohort also adopted authoritarian or at least more communitarian social values regarding a variety of concerns including parental standards, lack of respect, and general moral decline. One respondent is unhappy about 'the Tories in charge of the country' but also 'the way society is today and how the world is changing, a lack of morals' (ID66 F42). Another is unhappy with high levels of inequality but also with 'parents who think that rude and inconsiderate children are -only "expressing themselves" and don't need to take responsibility for their actions' (ID182 F51) while one respondent is unhappy about 'poverty and cruelty experienced by helpless people' but also 'yobbish behaviour and lack of courtesy and good manners' (ID129 M74).

These comments illustrate one aspect of the "cultural cleavage" Curtice (2018) describes where self-placement on the ideological left can be accompanied by critiques of 'liberal endorsement of self-expression over collective responsibilities' (Calder 2004:2). Two of those quoted in the previous paragraph are female, 42 and 51 years old respectively, which illustrates how estrangement 'from the predominant values in their own country...progressive tides of cultural change which they do not share' (Norris & Inglehart 2016:4-5) are not necessarily, despite Inglehart and Norris' (2016) findings, the preserve of older men.

In addition, ID58, who is concerned about the influx of foreigners in "her" city, then goes on to say that 'even further afield I am unhappy about world strife and the fact that so many people still lack basic amenities'. This seemingly paradoxical position which encompasses both nativist parochialism and universalist sympathy is, for Baggini (2008), fairly typical of 'mainstream english culture...it's not that people lack compassion' (Baggini 2008:67) or even tolerance, but that 'the importance of tolerance runs parallel to an unwillingness to see the mainstream way of life changed too radically and which values continuity, community, stability and a sense of belonging' (Baggini 2008:76). Furthermore, 'cosmopolitan' liberalism (Norris & Inglehart 2016) denoting comfort 'living in a

diverse, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic society' (Curtice 2018:89) does imply a more urban demographic and, as explored previously, one of the features of the MO panel is its predominantly non-urban constituency¹⁹.

These accounts were written before the seismic political events including the EU referendum and the Trump election that 'shocked the west' (Eatwell & Goodwin 2018:ix) and 'disrupted Western elites' (Norris & Inglehart 2016:1). But the alienation shown towards political systems, unhappiness at inequality coupled with a declinist moral narrative do hint at one of Norris and Inglehart's (2016:1) feature of populist sentiment that it cuts across 'left/right ideological self-placement'. At the very least, these accounts both predict and reflect increasingly polarised UK politics.

Narratives of Decline

A critique pertaining to a national narrative of decline (Hookway 2018) was another theme of social unhappiness. This is significant in understanding how alienation from one's society is expressed as an 'aspiration gap' (Taylor 2010) between personal conceptions of the good and those society increasingly appears to value and tolerate (Sayer 2007). One narrative merged economic critique with moral turpitude, focused on corporate cultures and practices. One respondent refers to 'banks unable to control themselves' (ID42 M47) while another is more specific in her critique of the behaviours and vices of business elites: 'exploitative power, greed, self-interest, dishonesty (of which there is an enormous amount in commerce these days, more than I have ever known)' (ID75 F79). In addition, respondents cited "consumerism" or the "consumer society" as causes of unhappiness, the following excerpt is illustrative of many comments:

'our frantic economy, the me-first culture is so undignified and unpleasant. I would rather have less, treat people with respect, live rather than consume. That would make me happy' (ID42 M47)

This builds on themes explored in Chapter Four where a happy life was widely viewed in opposition to consumerism and 'focusing on possessions as the main means of expressing who we are' (Jones 2003:160). The problem of selfish materialism forms part of a wider critique of what ID2 calls the 'me-first culture'. This is captured by one respondent who is unhappy about 'the way society is today...that we are more concerned with ourselves and not others' (ID66 F42). These sentiments echo Communitarian philosophy (e.g. MacIntyre 1981; Etzioni 1998) concerned about the loosening of social and communal ties and the perceived loss of 'trust, mutual understanding and forms of reciprocity' (Calder 2004:1). But whereas in capitalist critiques explored previously, social selfishness

¹⁹ Of the 200 panel respondents, 56 live in cities.

is laid at the door of irresponsible elites, communitarianism is as interested in the social responsibilities of ordinary citizens. Accounts of rudeness, inconsiderate behaviour and selfishness such as littering are combined with reflection about the socially patterned nature of these norms. For one respondent, 'generally it is a lack of manners and consideration for others that I find makes me unhappy' (ID103 F43).

Echoing themes explored in the previous section, it is possible for individual respondents, particularly older ones, to incorporate both communitarian motifs and left/liberal ideological perspectives in their analysis of selfishness and moral decline (Haidt 2012; Curtice 2018). For example, one respondent critiques the selfishness and greed of governments and commerce, 'more than I ever known' but also writes about a broader cultural trend of 'lack of awareness, selfishness and all rights and no responsibilities' (ID75 F79) while another links unhappiness with social inequality and writes 'I am still hoping that we may accomplish a fairer society' while also deploring the 'materialism exhibited by many these days' (ID82 M62).

Phrasing such as 'these days' and 'more than I ever known' conveys the idea that conditions are deteriorating. Writers on national identity note the paradox that one consistent belief about the nation is that it is always getting worse, what one describes as 'the national myth of perpetual decline' (Baggini 2008:67). One manifestation of this narrative is a temporal orientation towards the past. One older respondent criticises the 'materialism exhibited by many these days' and contrasts this 'with the achievements through struggle and hard work by my generation'. He concludes his response to Q6 with the statement: 'I realise there is much good in the world, and life for we have much to be grateful for. However I wonder if I am truly much happier than when times were harder during the war years' (iD155 M89).

Skey (2011:25) believes that some of the psychological benefits of belonging to a nation or culture are derived from the 'stable footing of perceived collective continuities', rooted in an understanding of 'the ongoing (re)production of the nation as a more or less coherent entity moving inexorably through time and perceptions of the social group as unified over extended historical periods' (Skey 2013:89). That being the case, contrasting modern social norms unfavourably with past norms, and the sense of discontinuity and disruption this invokes, produces what Skey (2011:16) terms 'estranged belonging'. In the following excerpts about moral decline, a preference for the past is signalled by phrasing like 'ever-increasing tendency' and 'in more recent times'. In addition, a sense of lamentation over modern norms is denoted by the prefixes 'sadly' and 'I deplore':

'Sadly I appear to come across more and more people who won't treat others with respect. I also seem to come across many people who can only think of themselves, and either look

down on others or completely ignore them. When I was younger I used to respect everyone I came across, and I actually enjoyed listening to their views and life stories. Unfortunately in more recent times I seem to come across many very boring people who think their lives and views are far more important than anyone else's' (ID46 M47)

'I deplore the ever-increasing tendency of people not saying "thank you" when you hold a door open or stand aside for them and drivers who can't be bothered to wave when you've waited to let them through a narrow gap' (ID138 F66)

As Chaney (2002:53 in Skey 2011:18) observes, 'the very banality of the accomplishment of everyday life masks its significance'. That these declinist narratives are located in everyday and mundane settings —driving a car, entering a building, interacting with others— shows the power of the taken for granted everyday realm that provides 'a sense of symbolic and institutional order thus making our relations with other people more meaningful, manageable and secure through a complex array of repetitive but barely acknowledged daily activities in shared spatial and temporal zones of operation (Skey 2011: 31&17). In these zones, 'how well people display approved cultural traits like civility and politeness' (Skey 2011:31) is particularly important because they allow us to get things done and makes social interaction easier. This is possibly one reason why behaviours like rudeness, loudness, bad manners matter, and are commented on so much. When the 'ordered reality of the social realm' (Skey 2013:89) is disrupted or threatened, etiquette breaches are reconfigured as ethical transgressions, showing how familiarity and habit become elided with common-sense virtue (Skey 2011). What ID138 calls 'the ever-increasing tendency of not saying thankyou' is a good example of a breach of what Fox (2004) terms 'English politeness rules' that are culturally important because they symbolize fairness and respect.

Little wonder then that the breaching of accepted social norms is often blamed on an 'undomesticated other' (Skey 2011), particularly foreigners and migrant groups: research 'has demonstrated how the presence, sounds and habits of 'foreign' people in the most ordinary of settings, workplaces, cafes, hospitals, shops, is seen to violate the norms of everyday (national) life' (Skey 2013:94). As previously seen, one respondent dislikes foreigners talking loudly on their phones. Another describes a situation where 'I descended a narrow staircase at an art gallery here in London - as I was halfway down, a party of young French schoolchildren started to come up with no concern at all for anyone in their way and their teachers showed no concern either' (ID38 F66).

Some sociologists (e.g. Skey 2011; Hage 1998) are keen to link narratives of decline with anti-immigration beliefs through perceptions of the threatening forces of the 'other'. These groups 'challenge established practices or norms' (Skey 2013:89) and their 'presence becomes an issue for

more dominant groups' (Skey 2013:93) who then feel the need to 'regulate strangeness' (Noble 2005) in order to preserve their privileged status. These ideas link to Curtice's concept of older, socially conservative individuals uncomfortable 'living in a diverse, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic society' (Curtice 2018:89).

That the MO respondents, like Skey's research subjects, were overwhelmingly 'born and brought up in the UK' (Skey 2011:5) could imply that opposition to "others" is due to 'the largely taken-for-granted status of the ethnic majority and the degree to which it underpins claims to belonging and entitlement that are used to secure...privileged access to key material and psychological resources claimed by those with more national cultural capital' (Skey 2011:81&91). As explored in Chapter Six, Hage's (1998) concept of national cultural capital reflects 'hierarchies of belonging that operate within a given national setting and the extent to which particular claims to belong are recognized, negotiated or repudiated' (Skey 2013:82). Those in possession of more national cultural capital 'are able to make judgments about other people and...position themselves as the legitimate arbiters of values, norms and social practices within the nation' (Skey 2013:92).

However, if it is the case that some older respondents are unhappy is due to an erosion of the 'stable footing' (Skey 2011) of national belonging that felt secure in the past but is threatened by the present and where confidence in their sense of entitlement to make judgements is offset by perceive a loss of status, then overall this seems more about generational than ethnic conflict (there is more explicit support for immigrants than disapproval). One respondent is unhappy about 'general views...that foreigners only come to this country to get a free deal, that all our problems would be solved if we got rid of foreigners' (ID104 M64) but goes on to criticize modern parents and their children:

'I'm quite old-fashioned - my values etc. and seeing so much rudeness in everyday life is sad making. I believe a lot of it stems from being spoilt and the love of money. arrogance and a bullish nature can be linked to the attitude of 'I want, I get' which is so apparent, children being asked by their parents "what would you like to do now?" etc. etc. knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing' (ID104 F64)

His views are another example of how social unhappiness can cut across left/right ideological distinctions (Curtice 2018; Eatwell & Goodwin 2018; Norris & Inglehart 2016) through demonstrating support for marginalised groups and a dislike of social inequality combined with traditional perspectives about moral codes and a suspicion about untrammelled free expression and individual license. Alienation from and antagonism towards modern norms echoes the explorations of social class in Chapter Six where respondents with highbrow cultural tastes, signifying traditional and also

ageing forms of cultural capital (Savage 2015), tatus as legitimate arbiters of culture were seeing their status as legitimate arbiters of culture threatened and undermined by the emerging pluralist cultural capital of a younger, urban and cosmopolitan generation. Subsequently, narratives of moral decline that emerge as a theme of social unhappiness seems to reflect wider generational and social conflict where individuals feel 'out of place' (Cohen 2000:582).

Attentiveness to the social position of MO respondents reflects Skey's (2011:21) dictum that researchers not 'privilege the psyche of the categorising individual' as this 'underplays the degree to which established social relations and structures constrain processes of imagination and identification' (Skey 2011:31). However, unhappiness with or about selfishness, rudeness, unkindness matter over and above how they connect to norms of cultural obedience and objective social status (Sayer 2011). Significantly for understanding the weave between personal and social wellbeing, neither is their disapproval merely an involuntary response of engrained habit and familiarity. As shown in Chapter Seven, these are the very same behaviours and practices that individuals are highly sensitive to relation to how others treat them and so have direct implications for wellbeing (Sayer 2011). In addition, the types of vices and blameworthy conduct directed at political and corporate elites- greed, thoughtlessness, dishonesty- are much the same types of conduct that respondents describe making them unhappy when feeling mistreated by others (and indeed their own mistreatment of others). As I now go on to show, perceptions of the normative features of social life expands to a more global scope of concern.

"Helpless" Concern

Social unhappiness which exhibits general and universal concerns and so transcends national and cultural preoccupations emerged as a key theme. One aspect of this concern entailed referring to and reflecting on cruelty and suffering, often combined with feelings of helplessness, what one respondent described as 'injustices in the world I can do little about' (ID39 F70). These injustices frequently focused on cruelty towards and suffering of powerless and vulnerable groups but encompassed a range of global examples from stories of abuse and violence to wars, refugee crises and natural disasters. Again, this was often combined with what one respondent called 'the sense of hopelessness in the face of such horrors' (ID28 F61). One older respondent provides a negative appraisal of what he calls 'the state of the world':

'the state of the world is so awful, so many people being killed or maimed, often because of religious differences, opposition to totalitarian governments, the worst using torture on their foes. I don't think there has ever been so much dissatisfaction, which results in misery for so many' (ID1 M80)

This comment is an example of how happiness can be used as a diagnostic tool (Walker & Kavedžija 2015) to evaluate what is good or bad about what is currently happening in a wider, social sense; happiness is not just something people experience but reflect on in terms of others' wellbeing. Linked to Haidt's (2012) 'Care/Harm' moral foundation explored previously, these expressions of concern ranged from one respondent's comment that 'any person suffering makes me unhappy' to another's response to Q6 that unhappiness is caused by 'any suffering -people living with cancer, HIV and incurable painful illnesses, injustices in the world. I suffer and feel for all examples of victimization, brutality, unfairness, pain in ways that make me feel deeply unhappy' (ID5 F39).

What also characterized these expressions of unhappiness about global events was an accompanying feeling of helplessness, for one respondent 'all the bad things in the world and that feeling of helplessness sets in' (ID164 M25). This could also be expressed by a lack of belief in the capacity of human societies to transform societies for the better or to prevent harm. One respondent's comment about 'this life and system' captures a sense of impotence:

'the way that we are trapped in this life and system without having any power to change it, and that it causes so much suffering around the world. it makes me so unhappy that this seems to be the way it is, and we are so accepting of it' (ID42 M47)

This use of "we", invoking fellow citizens, who lack the will as well as the capacity to change social conditions, is also reflected by one respondent's complaints about the exorbitant wages of footballer's wages. In both cases, the use of the collective pronoun shows how individuals position themselves as concerned citizens as opposed to mere observers or being wholly preoccupied with their own lives:

'I get irritated by the fact that there is so much injustice and poverty in the world, but yet we can afford to pay footballers millions of pounds per year while they starve. This is completely insane, and what's worse is you rarely find anyone amongst Joe Public who agrees with the amount footballers are paid, but nothing is ever done about it' (ID14 F21)

Such frustration echoes ideas about the democratic deficit (Norris 2012) where citizens increasingly feel unable to influence events, partly because the main means of pursuing social change, democratic institutions, are perceived to have become incompetent or untrustworthy, as the earlier sections on disaffection showed. The 'temporal orientation' (Walker & Kavedžija 2015) of social concern can also shift to the future, illustrated by one older respondent who laments the state of the environment and the negative consequences for her grandchildren:

‘At the moment I think of my nine-year-old grandson, living in a very polluted part of London, who has asthma (in a car-less family) in a week where pollution, mostly coming from industrial countries (including Britain) and the heavy use of diesel and petrol-fuelled vehicles, is very high. When will we ever learn?’ (ID75 F79)

Again, the use of the collective pronoun and plaintive question addressing an undefined but seemingly global audience shows how concern and unhappiness can be decoupled from self-interest and focus instead on others’ wellbeing. The ‘post-mortem welfare’ (Thin 2012) of humanity that transcend the horizons and lifespan of the self (Taylor 1992) can also be seen in the response to Q6 by a respondent worried about the ‘changing climate and how it will affect the world in the future’ (ID74 F80).

One pattern to these responses was how often the news media frames the information individuals receive and whether it paints a distorted, overly negative picture of events. As one respondent comments: ‘the news can be terrible: hearing about the suffering of others, war, murder, starvation, injustice. political horrors. It can make me very angry as well as unhappy’ (ID156 F61)

As explored in Chapter Two, one contested debate in the Social Sciences is whether cultural pessimism about the state of the world is justified by the evidence, with a range of cultural optimists such as Hans Rosling (2018) and Steven Pinker (2012) mobilising a large corpus of data about global life expectancy, health outcomes and access to education to suggest that not only is life for most people in the world better than for previous generations, the likelihood is that life will continue to get better in these key domains going forward. As Ridley (in Pinker et al 2016:4) points out, improvements ‘don’t make the news’. In her examination of the rise of political disaffection in the West, Norris (2012) suggests that part of what explains these trends is this skewed, overly negative, nature of news and media content. The sense that the news media may be responsible for negative and pessimistic perspectives provided by respondents may also be surmised from the following response to Q6:

‘things that make me unhappy is the constant revelation of corruption, crime, bad governance around the world. My ‘moaning’ starts as I view the tv news because I feel the frustration at my impotence to alter anything’ (ID155 M83)

Still, what may be as relevant as any truthfulness of these social appraisals is what ID155 terms ‘my impotence to alter anything’ about them. The twin themes of social concern and lack of agency link to a perceived psychosocial dimension (Dean 2009) of wellbeing about how individuals seek to establish cognitive order and coherence when connecting their own lives with their external

environment (Thin 2012). As Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi (2003:94) asserts, 'a sense that life has meaning is associated with wellbeing' and Thin (2012) suggests that meaning-in-life is in part pursued through agential attempts to establish a sense of order and coherent patterning. In being 'uniquely and universally concerned about wellbeing', Thin (2012:325) also emphasises the social outlook this can involve; 'worldwide, people are interested in the aesthetic quality of individuals' lives, seeking the sense that someone's life has a good "feel" or "pattern", that it is a good example of a human life, that it is not a "mess"' (Thin 2012:322).

Significantly, unhappiness can be accommodated into a wider narrative of meaning providing it has a purpose or contains valuable learning or lessons; suffering too, 'can be tamed by being rendered meaningful' (Thin 2012:322). Indeed, respondents explored a range of "meaningful" suffering, for example in the way (explored in Chapter Seven) one respondent described how his son's death from a motorcycle accident strengthened his marriage through a collaborative process of bereavement and mutual care. In contrast, unhappy or tragic events that can't be sufficiently explained, justified or rendered meaningful frustrate the desire for order so that a sense of 'chaos and pattern-less' (Thin 2012:322) sets in. In global terms, suffering, violence and cruelty 'is "meaningless" if it lacks a clear sense of purpose and justice' (Thin 2012:322). This is reflected in the way many respondents wrote about 'innocent' victims, particularly a triptych of "innocents": children, animals and the natural environment, one respondent unhappy about 'the lack of consideration by others towards people, animals or the surroundings' (ID99 M45).

For one respondent, 'cruelty to children and animals make me unhappy' (ID150 F49), for another it is 'hearing sad stories of abuse or harm to people, animals or the planet' (ID88 F33). Cruelty towards vulnerable groups such as children and animals, what ID35 calls 'the innocents' is not only meaningless but incomprehensible (Thin 2012). In psychosocial terms, the attempt to establish a sense of order is 'the desire for 'internal consistency (the sense of fit between the different activities, roles, and phases of an individual's life) and external consistency (links between the individual and broader patterned environments)' (Thin 2012:323). When external dissonance not consistency is experienced, this leads to 'antisense; the frustrated desire to establish a sense of order to events' (Thin 2012:323).

This frustrated desire for order matters because it relates to another important psychosocial dimension: autonomy, defined as 'as a sense of choice, volition and freedom' (Ryan & Deci 2000:74). As explored in Chapter Six, the 'growth narrative' (Bauer 2008 et al) relates to the eudemonic idea of being on the right path, of getting somewhere, but also on the sense that one has agency and capacity to author the journey. These narratives about global events are a kind of 'anti-growth

narrative' in that respondents express a sense of the social world being on the wrong path, heading for disaster, and feeling powerless to change it.

Autonomy needs cut across personal and social domains. As one respondent puts it, 'lack of control is at the heart of everything that makes me unhappy from not being able to get work in my chosen field to watching the foundation of social care, education, employment etc being dismantled in my lifetime' (ID63 F48). As Sayer stresses, (2011:127), 'we may be depressed by the decline of an institution to which we have become committed, or by the loss of a loved one. There is thus no clear distinction between our own flourishing and that of our commitments; they are fused'. This overlap between personal and social realms is underlined by another respondent who locates unhappiness in 'the inability to change things that make life difficult for me or other people' (ID195 F45).

Autonomy has been portrayed as an individualistic concept, but for Ryan and Deci (2000:74), 'autonomy is not 'antagonistic to relatedness...it refers not to being independent, detached or selfish but rather to the feeling of volition that can accompany any act, whether dependent or independent, collectivist or individualist'. The ways in which respondents narrate a lack of control through social themes, from global suffering to disaffection with political structures, may signify a more relational and socially engaged nature of autonomy and what it means to feel "in control".

Another social dimension of autonomy is how 'most people show considerable effort, agency and commitment in their lives' (Ryan & Deci 2000:68) but this agency can be stymied in 'social environments that are antagonistic to these tendencies' (Ryan & Deci 2000:69). For some respondents, critical appraisals of social conditions were given added poignancy when these were connected to their own situations. This is illustrated in the way one respondent identifies a social problem about corporate practices and links this directly to the precariousness of his own situation:

'the precarious nature of people's work worries me, and the amount of corporate wriggling and accepting of changes to my own conditions to keep my job exasperates me...we continually take on more work and accept worse conditions under threat of redundancy"
(ID42 M47)

Another respondent is also unhappy about the 'corruption and greed of some people...such as the bosses of companies who take bonuses and pay increases whilst laying off employees' (ID182 F51) and links this to her own workplace vulnerability.

Moral Sentiments and Elevation

'The relational quality of human social being' (Sayer 2011:124) and the way it includes a quality of fellow-feeling and sympathy for the suffering of others is placed at the heart of the Eighteenth

Century Philosopher Adam Smith's (2013:13) theory of 'moral sentiments', that 'by the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments...this is the source of our fellow-feeling for the misery of others...by changing places in fancy with the sufferer'.

This capacity of imagination to inspire fellow-feeling is reflected upon by one respondent as being related to practical wisdom: 'I learnt early on in life visualising walking in other people's shoes made you realise their needs'. This capacity for imagining ourselves into the situation of others, for Nussbaum (1999) a key ingredient of compassion, presupposes our own vulnerability and susceptibility to harm, as 'It implies that an individual has a conception of themselves not only as 'I' but as a person like others, having much in common with them in terms of capacities and susceptibilities' (Sayer 2011:123).

This imaginative capacity based on a shared human predicament, vulnerability to harm, is illustrated in various comments about the suffering of others. Significantly, these appraisals of social conditions and 'being responsive to how people are faring and whether they are suffering or flourishing' (Hookway 2018:108) are often framed and described using terms (Sayer calls these 'thick ethical concepts' such as injustice and harm) striking similar to those used to evaluate their own and others' conduct in everyday life. In the accounts, moral sentiments like 'injustice', 'bullying', 'cruelty', 'lying', 'selfishness' 'untrustworthy', 'rudeness' and 'greed' interact across personal conduct, social interactions, and national and global domains. For one respondent, unhappiness relates to 'unkindness, whether to me or someone I care for or amongst people you read about in the news' (ID96 F81). These types of appraisals underline what Hookway (2018) calls the 'aboutness' of morality concerning harm and flourishing that both encompass and transcend personal life, including 'how people should treat others and be treated by them' (Sayer 2007:951) and also illustrate how personal wellbeing concerns and social commentary interact and overlap.

Smith (2013:13) begins *Moral Sentiments* with the observation that 'how selfish so ever a man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it'. In this vein, Jonathan Haidt's empirical work on happiness explores 'the power of positive moral emotions to uplift and transform people' (Haidt 2003:275) that he calls "elevation". These elevated sentiments relate to practices, examples, behaviours and characteristics and 'acts of virtue or moral beauty' (Haidt 2013:276) that inspire people. One respondent explores "elevation" in this way:

‘love hearing or reading stories about people helping each other, especially strangers, through kindness or courage. Kindness might include giving time for a lonely person, or giving refuge to someone without a home. Courage would include hiding people from the Nazis during the Second World War. It makes me happy when people are good to each other for the simple reason that they feel it's the right thing to do’ (ID182 F51)

In Chapter Six I linked Haidt’s ideas about elevation to occasions when respondents feel themselves lifted up or transported to a “higher” level of self-consciousness through moments connected with nature, art and music. Here, themes of elevation are grounded in moral behaviours and virtues. Haidt’s (2003:276) explanation for “elevation” is that individuals (intuitively) map behaviours onto a vertical social space with ‘good’ being equivalent to ‘noble, pure and godlike’ and with bad located lower down as ‘degrading, base, animal or demon-like’. These moral sensitivities, Haidt suggests, explain why individuals feel inspired by virtuous or noble acts but equally feel degraded by what they witness on the news or in their everyday encounters and interactions, experiencing this ‘as a kind of debasement, or bringing down of a nonphysical, moral component of their selves’ (Haidt 2003:281). Significantly for understanding the phenomenon of social unhappiness in the MOP accounts, “elevation” and “degradation” demonstrate how ‘we are easily and strongly moved by the altruism of others’ (Haidt 2003:284) but on the flipside are made unhappy by cruelty and suffering. Both elevation and degradation combine in the following response:

‘seeing charity and rescue for vulnerable sick people, acts of compassion and generally reaching out to disadvantaged souls always makes me happy in that topsy-turvy way-you feel sympathy and sadness but joy that something is being done’ (ID5 F39)

What ID5 terms the ‘topsy-turvy’ complexity of emotions links to Cieslik’s (2014) research and also data presented in Chapter Four about the way parsing happiness and unhappiness misses a more ‘holistic’ characteristic where positive and negative emotions intertwine. Also, elevated responses can arise out of negative feelings, in the way witnessing or learning about others’ suffering can also motivate people to act (Sayer 2011). In this way, the ‘charity and rescue’ activities cited by ID5 are mirrored by another’s comment about ‘those wonderful people who go out to war-torn countries, mostly medical people... If they have despair in their hearts then something else takes over and they go on and on’ (ID124 F75).

These inspirational examples illustrate the honorific qualities and virtues that respondents associate with “higher” or more “noble” humanity. On a more prosaic level, one respondent describes being uplifted by ‘an act of kindness or good service...when someone goes that little bit extra to help you out or make your day easier. An act of kindness warms the heart, it doesn't take much. Even a kind

or encouraging word is a balm to the soul' (ID42 M47). This description of everyday examples of humanity link to ideas of elevation (not least in the use of religious language- soul- where no deity is implied, explored in Chapter Six) but also shows how concepts of virtue or honorific behaviour stretch across personal and global domains; compassion and kindness can be expressed fleetingly or in more heroic examples of doctors risking their own lives in conflicts around the world.

For Haidt (2003:276), one consequence of witnessing and experiencing examples of 'elevated' humanity is how it 'also motivates people to behave more virtuously themselves'; on the flipside, things that horrify us spark the desire to rectify the situation For one retired University Lecturer, the existence of what she terms 'cruelty and injustice, poverty and deprivation' is the reason why she feels 'compelled to remain involved in various political campaigns even when sometimes I despair of ever making a difference' (ID65 F67).

The Defended Self?

One methodological problem, in highlighting the social concerns respondents write about, is taking these accounts and their contents at face value and potentially falling into the trap of what Holloway (2006:545) terms the 'disappointingly descriptive tendencies' of qualitative empirical research. This may obscure the way 'anxiety and its related defences are part of the human condition' (Holloway 2006:545). Introduced in Chapter Seven, these defence mechanisms signify a problem in social research whereby through a process of personal displacement, in this case, the way in which respondents may focus on the unhappiness of others while not touching upon their own, individuals deflect pain and defend the self against difficult emotions like anxiety or feelings of failure. Focusing on social issues rather than one's own could be another manifestation of the 'defended self' (Holloway 2006).

If society is a place over which individuals feel they have little or no control, then for one respondent, the solution is simply to exclude the things over which they have no control from their happiness. In response to Q6 she states 'there are all the things in the world - poverty, injustice, illness, starvation - but there's nothing I can do about them, so I can't be unhappy about them' (ID143 F69). For another respondent, 'if we all thought really hard about serious world affairs, like the strife in Syria, Egypt and so on, like natural disasters all over the world, like poverty, hunger, disease, we'd all go out and shoot ourselves but there's no point' (ID53 F66).

By flagging then resolving their concern, these two excerpts echo Hyman's (2014) analysis that some subjects perform a technology on their selves which transforms negative into positive affect, echoing Furedi's (2004) concept of "Therapeutic Discourse" whereby individuals are governed by the desire

to accentuate positive feelings and eliminate negative ones. Other respondents narrate ways of disassociating from social suffering congruent with Furedi's depiction of agents working actively to eliminate negative emotions. Two respondents describe their avoidance strategy:

'If I can avoid anything sad I do. I try very hard not to watch anything on TV which is upsetting so I choose not to watch the news, appeals, operations, some documentaries etc' (ID121 F59)

'Plenty of things make me unhappy but I try to avoid them, eg. I don't keep up with the news, which is generally about something depressing' (ID168 M25)

These comments also underline an earlier point about the way social unhappiness is directly mediated by the news. Here, unhappiness can be literally "turned off". Another dimension to avoidance can be analysed through the psychoanalytic concept of 'projection' (Hoggett 2003), where individuals split off from their own negativity and uncertainty and project it onto society (explored in Chapter Seven). This could explain the way society appears in so many unhappiness accounts but rarely in positive ones. In psychanalytic terms (Cieslik 2017), projecting unhappiness into the social realm is a strategy designed to deflect against personal vulnerability, anxiety and negative feelings about one's own lives.

In addition, Skey's (2011) analysis of research subjects who express concern with social issues and solidarity with disadvantaged groups, is that in research settings it's easy to adopt an 'enlightened perspective...it is not only socially desirable but also doesn't cost anything' (Skey 2011:58). The implication is that expressing concern for others is a performative gesture designed to present oneself in the best possible light. It also implies that if there is no real cost, there is also no real pain. As one respondent put it:

'Listening to the hardship or suffering of others around the world is something that could make me upset, rather than unhappy. I think of upset as being a milder expression to use, and maybe a feeling that lasts for less time' (ID196 F45)

Furthermore, it is hard to take seriously another's unhappiness with 'all the bad things in the world and that feeling of helplessness sets in, the feeling of no control and not being able to help' when they immediately follow this with 'oh and stir fry's' (ID164 M25)

But simply abstracting social concerns to performative gestures would only be broadly applicable if those respondents exploring social unhappiness did not also discuss personal examples of unhappiness. However, the majority who cite unhappiness with society are also willing to explore their unhappiness in much more personal terms, from their own inadequacies and failures to

experiences of bereavement and loss (explored in Chapter Seven). This implies a richer and thicker conceptualisation of agents as 'normative beings whose fundamental relation to the world is one of concern and care for ourselves and others' (Hookway 2018:109). As one respondent puts it, 'I cannot imagine ever not feeling very unhappy about aspects of the current human condition and the political undercurrents that steer lives about' (ID5 F39).

Towards the 'Good Society'?

Happiness accounts reveal sensitivity to others and 'being alive to their welfare' (Sayer 2004:7). These normative appraisals 'of what kinds of behaviour are good, how we should treat others and be treated by them... merge into what philosophers term 'conceptions of the good' - ideas or senses of how one should live' (Sayer 2004:4). Therefore, critical appraisals of policies and politics are tacitly connected to beliefs and values about the nature of the good life and good society (Edwards 2009).

Edwards (2005:10) defines the Good Society as 'a kind of society characterised by positive norms and values as well as success in meeting particular social goals'. Of course, what norms, values and goals we should be aspiring to is a contested matter. As explored in Chapter Two, national happiness or wellbeing is a normative concept rather than a descriptive entity, so that any depiction of what it is or might look like is conditioned by what versions of the good one subscribes to, making it not just a subjective but ideological question.

Taking the responses explored in this chapter, those from a left/liberal perspective, with their concerns about income inequality, corporate practices, and welfare policy and suffering of minorities, might conceptualise an aspirational idea of a good or happier society as one with greater equality and compassion, stronger financial regulation and increased welfare spending. Their views are not dissimilar to one Centre-Left UK Thinktank's that 'the guiding principle of the good society is social justice, the ethical core of which is greater equality. Individuals require equal civil, political and social rights; the means to effectively exercise these rights through the equitable distribution of power and influence; sufficient income and wealth to meet essential needs' (Compass 2006:21). In addition, their unhappiness with society could be derived from the notion that 'we live in a good society already – it's just that it is not ours. We live in the good society of neo-liberal beliefs and practices...unchecked markets do untold damage to individuals and communities' (Compass 2006:13). As one respondent puts it: 'I no longer have any connection to or interest in society as it is currently formed. I fundamentally disagree that the market is the answer and that everything can and should operate a profit' (ID63 F48).

By contrast, those from a more socially conservative or communitarian point of view would probably emphasise the importance of social cohesion, binding norms, the strengthening of morality and maybe tighter controls on immigration. They are likely to treat with suspicion an overly socially liberal aspiration of the Good Society 'determined by an ability to control more of my life and by definition be free of the control of others' (Lawson in Compass 2006:13) or necessarily agree that a good society consists of 'greater diversity and less deference' (Lawson in Compass 2006:13).

As demonstrated previously, a number of respondents would seem comfortable adopting aspects of both "left" and "socially conservative" visions of a Good Society. An example of this is how both liberal and conservative perspectives in these accounts share a temporal orientation towards the past' (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:2). As social conditions are judged to have declined, both look to past eras as good societies. For left/liberals, the good society took effect in 1945 and declined from the 1970s onwards. Communitarians have a less specific temporal boundary- it is about contrasting the generation they grew up with current generations.

The second aspect of a Good Society is more concrete than ideological (though this is still implicit) and is based on the wellbeing tradition that a happy life requires tangible and fungible resources that individuals can access and utilise (Dean 2009). As detailed in Chapter Seven, personal unhappiness can be directly linked to wider political and socio-economic circumstances, particularly for those (relatively few, in terms of the whole cohort) who are unemployed, physically disabled and/or living with mental health problems. Reliant on healthcare and social security systems that were perceived to be becoming less reliable/ more punitive. In these cases, unhappiness was linked to material deprivation, combined with psychological states of stress, depression and shame.

Money is another dimension of the relationship between resources and happiness. As explored in Chapter Two, one key finding of happiness research is how wealth has been shown to have a strong positive correlation with self-reported life satisfaction upto a certain level (Layard 2011) and that much more beyond this have low marginal gains in happiness terms. Conversely, an increase in wealth for someone on a low income has a significant positive impact, captured by one comment that money 'can allow a freedom from many of the drudgeries and restrictions which life without money can create' (ID41 M35). Lack of money can be detrimental to wellbeing not just materially or through the mental health implications of worry and uncertainty but also on the destructive effect on relationships and family life. As one respondent put it:

'I don't want to be rich but I want to be comfortable. I grew up without any money and I know how difficult it was for my parents to make end meet. Also, the only time my husband I really argued was before we sorted out the household finances' (ID150 F49)

Many respondents echoed ID150's distinctions between material lack, material sufficiency and material excess. For one, the importance is 'having enough money to not worry about it' (ID150 F49) while another describes 'the disaster a lottery win has been for so many people' while also acknowledging 'from past experience a dire shortage of money can cause much anxiety' (ID68 F83). This simultaneously critical and positive stance about the relationship between happiness and money is illustrated by a lengthier response to Q2 regarding sources of happiness:

'This may seem an odd one, as in many ways I consider money to be the root of a lot of problems, both in my life and the world in general. But money can also buy you the ability to be able to focus on what you really want, as long as you can see past the superficial aspects of it... I would say perhaps I don't see money itself as making me happy on its own, but it allows other things to take fruit and be explored which do directly make me happy' (ID41 M35)

As explored in Chapter Two, in Capabilities Theory, a sufficient income is required for individuals to achieve 'valued functionings' and the freedom to pursue a life that has meaning (Alkire 2015). Money can facilitate choice, and its value is being a means to pursue a variety of ends but not as an end in itself. As another respondent puts it:

'We aren't rich but we don't worry at the end of the month. I know people who do and it has a big impact on what they can do. The fact I have the freedom to do most things I want is something I feel very happy about. It also makes it easier not to want or do things. A choice' (ID109 F39)

Part of the rationale for Capabilities Theory is that there are diverse pathways to personal fulfilment (Nussbaum & Sen 2003). Money can fund hobbies and pursuits and for one respondent this enables purchasing books: 'having been a "Bookworm" all my life its such a joy to know I have got the money buy any book that I want to read' (ID77 F73). Money can also be diverted towards values, social commitments and significant others, as one respondent illustrates:

'Having enough money to live on, enough to spare for needy causes, and enough to spare for those special things. Also enough to be able to give to my three Grand-children, this especially makes me very happy' ID108 F83)

The third aspect of a Good Society is what can be learned through turning an 'empathic lens' (Thin 2012:325) on the positive aspects of people's lives. This is problematic because of what some scholars (Thin 2014; Cieslik 2017; Bartram 2012) see as an excessive preoccupation within the Social

Sciences with negative aspects of western life, so that happiness is reframed as a problem with modernity. In this chapter, much of the social commentary is primarily negative. However, the emphasis on decline does presuppose an earlier time of flourishing, and this can shed light on some of the ways social contexts are perceived to foster rather than endanger wellbeing. One respondent sees his Career Development as having depended upon favourable social conditions:

‘I think I've been lucky in many ways, not least in having drifted into the Civil Service at a time when it was taking on all manner of near-unemployable young fools and giving them a chance’ (ID107 M55)

This idea of being ‘lucky’ frames the way other respondents reflect on their possession of basic goods that others in less prosperous countries lack. Though this can produce guilt, as seen in previous comments about fair trade and exploitation in this chapter, it can also show UK society in a more positive light by identifying the relative good fortune of living in a country and era where one has a ‘roof over my head’ (ID26 F54), of ‘having a home, food in the cupboards, heat and water if I need it’ (ID66 F42) and, as another respondent put it, that ‘despite having lived with heart problems for the last 20 years, thanks to modern medicine I am still able to live an almost normal life’ (ID77 F73).

Even though we may often take these for granted, comments like these link to themes explored in Chapter Four about a moderate idea of happiness ‘as a way of life’ (Telfer 1980:1) through the purposeful cultivation of contentment and gratitude. One respondent, undergoing gender reassignment and who primarily narrates her experiences as struggle, concedes the relative benefits of Western society in the wider perspective of freedoms: ‘I suppose I can be grateful that I can be me, when other people can't be themselves if they are in the closet, or in less liberal less tolerant societies’ (ID48 F32).

These comparisons are what Langlands (1999) would term ‘relationship’ as opposed to ‘category’ definitions of national identity. They build a notion of “we” in direct comparison with “them” instead of identifying the intrinsic goods of a particular culture or society (Cohen 2000). While this may frame positives within a negative framework, it is also the case that many of the sources for flourishing identified in this research, access to Higher Education, freedom to form relationships across sexual orientations, a welfare state, an independent Civil Society, to name a few, do provide some positive indicators of wellbeing in the UK. However, given that some of these goods are perceived to be under threat, coupled with widespread disaffection with democratic structures and erosion of trust in politicians (both factors associated with lower national wellbeing in the UN Happiness Report (UNSDN 2019)), there can be little complacency and some cause for concern.

Summary

This chapter explored the social commentary that is a key feature of unhappiness accounts. A general disaffection and disillusionment with politicians and political structures was identified, echoing UK public perceptions data over the last decade (BSAS 2018) and connected to ideas around the 'democratic deficit' (Norris & Inglehart 2016). A left/right ideological split within this disaffection was also explored; predominantly this was weighted towards left/liberal concerns (Haidt 2012; Curtice 2018) about inequality, oppression and protecting public institutions like the NHS. Some right/conservative ideological perspectives around anti-immigration, anti-welfare and the decline of traditional moral norms were also identified. A broader narrative of decline regarding public virtues and social cohesion made ideological placement complex because of the way some respondents straddled both left/liberal and right/conservative positions. This reflects recent theorizing (Curtice 2018) that a socially liberal and socially conservative dichotomy is overlaying and disrupting traditional ideological divisions.

In addition, drawing on Skey's (2011;2012) work on national belonging, a sense that an older demographic felt alienated and out of place in the nation was identified. However, caution should be exercised in relation to what Skey (2011) terms 'ontological flattening': referring lay normative perspectives to social position or objective characteristics like age. Many behaviours and practices - disrespect, selfishness, inconsideration- identified as causes of social concern are much the same as those respondents identify as being causes of personal unhappiness in their relations with others, and indeed their own misconduct in those regards.

In addition, the way moral dimensions of happiness traversed the personal and social realm was explored through Adam Smith's (2013) theory of 'moral sentiments' and fellow-feeling, which provided insights as to why individuals care about others' wellbeing when they have no personal stake in the matter (while acknowledging strategies of deflection that may influence at least some of these socially concerned accounts). Lastly, how social appraisals, even negative ones, imply some 'conception of the good' (Sayer 2011) was explored. Although to a degree ideologically divided on the basis of a good society (Edwards 2005), common elements were identified, in particular material sufficiency that links to Capability Theory (Alkire 2015).

Chapter Nine: How Age Mediates Happiness

As explored in Chapter Two, one key finding from large-scale happiness surveys is how age mediates personal happiness. 'A priori, most would expect that happiness steadily declines with age, at least in adulthood, as do many of our physical and mental faculties' (Layard 2017:78). Instead, in what is known as the "U-shape" of age-based happiness (Branchflower & Oswald 2008), survey researchers have found that happiness levels are high for young adults, decline in middle-age, before rising again during the first decade of retirement. This patterned finding is consistent for 'many countries in many continents' (Layard 2013:78) although, as Branchflower & Oswald (2008:17), two leading researchers in this area, have admitted, 'what truly causes the U-shaped curve in human well-being...is currently unknown'.

Subsequently, as with other data produced by survey research, the significance of these findings is hampered by a lack of insight, principally what lies behind the numerical self-reports individuals of different ages provide when asked how happy they are. As 'our age impacts very powerfully on how we see ourselves' (Hockey & James 2003:3), how age mediates experiences and understanding of happiness across the MO cohort shed some light (McMahon 2006) on the empirical claims of happiness surveys.

Happy Retirement?

In the UK, ONS data (2018) shows that 65-74 year olds are the happiest age group. The reason? In the first decade of retirement, with fewer career and care responsibilities, 'older individuals can exercise more choice and are free to cultivate more meaningful pursuits (Hockey & James 2003: 203). They can focus on the activities and pastimes they value and enjoy and can invest more time in family and friends. As explored in previous chapters, autonomy is a cornerstone of wellbeing (Ryff 2006; Bauer et al 2008; Alkire 2015) and some older respondents wrote about retirement and freedom, as the following excerpts show:

'my current time of life - retired, in good health and able to please myself as to how I spend my time - is a happy time' (ID173 F64)

'Just as there are many things that make me happy there would be many things that would make me unhappy if I didn't have control of my life. Now I am retired my life is mine to control' (ID78)

A happy retirement is also something middle-age respondents look forward to, one response to Q5 about imagining a happiest day in the future is 'I do think one 'happiest' day will be when I leave work' (ID111 F54). Adopting a temporal orientation (Walker & Kavedžija 2015) towards 'the

anticipated future -- major life goals, dreams, and plans' (Bauer et al 2008:88), two middle-aged respondents reflect on what one calls their 'dream of retirement':

'In my dream of retirement, my partner is in full-time work in a job he enjoys. If he isn't we'll get a dog to keep him company whilst I'm doing all the things I want to do. I'll be able to exercise, garden, play my keyboard, learn languages, tidy and clean the house, possibly refresh my knowledge of Microsoft Excel or something similar, maybe do some voluntary work, and actually learn to cook and bake...I'll visit family and friends - sometimes staying away for a night or two, with or without him - and we'll also go away on some proper holidays' (ID182 F51)

'I have visions of us packing our bags and heading off on trips of 1-3 months to places where we could take time to soak up the atmosphere and really get to know other cultures. Whatever happens I would really like my wife and I to be healthy, spending the rest of our years just mooching around, going for walks, watching films/plays and reading all the books I've never had time to read' (ID46 M47)

These idealised visions of retirement suggest that far from withdrawal and disengagement (Hockey & James 2003), this time of life is a site of renewal and possibility, the chance to do things that really matter and motivate. The "things" these two respondents describe reflect themes identified in Chapters Five and Six about key sources of happiness: creative freedom, learning, travelling, spending more time with loved ones, engaging in arts and culture, meaningful and socially-aware work. Although the future is envisaged by both respondents as being spent alongside their spouses, ID182's plans are to be undertaken 'with or without my husband'. In her response to Q6 about unhappiness this becomes more apparent why, her husband is depressed and she feels weighed down by this.

Her comments illustrate how ideas about future happiness are produced from present conditions, telling us as much about what is currently happening as it does about future plans. Still in response to Q5, she envisages a range of changes to her current life that would benefit her wellbeing. These comments echo some of the wider happiness data about a midlife 'dip' (Cieslik 2017; Layard et al 2013), particularly how financial responsibilities like mortgages make middle age constraining and burdensome:

'I imagine I'll be very happy the day we pay the mortgage off, when we can start living again- Maybe we'll book a holiday and use that time to let it sink in, enjoy the sensation and make plans. I'll feel that I can buy things that I quite like rather than just things that we need- I'll be

able to think about leaving my current job and maybe get a local job that is far more rewarding, perhaps with colleagues whose company I find easier. Although I have heard that money doesn't buy you happiness, a reasonable chunk of it would probably help towards peace of mind, A decent lottery win would be appreciated because of all the extra options it would give me. Just enough to pay off the mortgage would be great (anything less would not be immediately life-changing) but the top Thunderball-prize would allow me to pay cash for a comfortable house with room for family to stay, without bothering with all that buying-selling chain nonsense, leaving enough for a relatively worry free retirement' (ID182 F51)

Synthesising a range of themes associated with happiness, reflections like these can show interactions between different domains of wellbeing that is impossible to grasp from survey research, underlining the advantages of qualitative data that offer 'thick descriptions because they create both deep and dense understandings of interactions and processes' (Smart 2007:42). Her comments show how a key shift or transformation in one domain, in this case financial, can produce beneficial ripple effects in other wellbeing domains like housing, mental health, relational life and meaningful work. Also, the way she describes what a lottery win would achieve (and implicitly, what it would not satisfy) encapsulates the wider findings explored in Chapters Two, Seven and Eight regarding the relationship between money and happiness: money is a means, not an end, and makes the most difference to those who are struggling (Layard 2011; Lelkes 2013).

ID182's response also demonstrates why happiness data tends to show mid-life as a happiness dip occurring 'on both sides of the Atlantic, in people's mid to late 40s' (Branchflower & Oswald 2008:1). Financial pressures like paying off a mortgage can trap individuals in reasonably-paid but unsatisfying work where they struggle to 'balance the need for an income with other interests and responsibilities' (Cieslik 2017:170). As one respondent whose age fits the 'mid-life dip' profile puts it: 'it's really hard to feel happy as you get older I think. You get so worn down with work and responsibilities' (ID43 F44).

In his empirical work, Cieslik records how younger thirty somethings can also feel 'stuck or conflicted about their lives' (Cieslik 2017:156). One account that echoes Cieslik's findings is from a 35 years old male designer who had relocated to New Zealand. He writes in detail about leaving his relationship, job and home to start a new life abroad. His reasons for this reflect Cieslik's (2017:203) idea of a 'happiness riddle': individuals make choices they believe will make them happy, but these are always fallible and uncertain; later they discover that these were the wrong choices and haven't produced the intended consequences. As he describes:

‘The last 3 years or so of my life have been increasingly unhappy - despite on the surface having an enviable life (an amazing supportive long term relationship, a beautiful house, an income as my own boss doing relatively creative work). But deep down I was becoming so unhappy because (although I didn't realise it) I was becoming more and more controlled by fear. And the fear was paralysing’ (ID41 M35)

This respondent’s description of his double life: outwardly everything seemed good while inwardly he felt increasingly unhappy, is linked to both Cieslik’s (2017) and Hyman’s (2014) empirical happiness work where they invoke Goffman’s (1990) idea of dramaturgy. Goffman explains how public life can resemble a performance that involves suppressing one’s real feelings. Anxiety results from the conflict involved in this suppression (Holloway 2006). As he continues:

‘In the end, out of what felt like sheer desperation, I did the only thing I could think of to break the cycle - I walked away from everything. Partner, job, home, safety, security. . . I gave all of it up and travelled to the other side of the world...in an effort to remove myself from the fear, the distractions, the gilded cage which was beginning to kill me - both mentally and physically’ (ID41 M35)

The allusion to the ‘gilded cage’ of well-paid work echoes Cieslik’s (2017:173) research where people ‘who appear successful...experience a temporary mid-life crisis’. While these examples are intensely personal, they have sociological significance in understanding how work, income and relationships, domains that frame key societal norms about the good or happy life, can produce alienation and anxiety, echoing sociological theorizing about “problems of modernity” (Durkheim 1990; Bauman 2001). ID41’s crisis sheds light on the way actors negotiate and grapple with societal norms in respect of their own values (Archer 2001; Sayer 2004); these may coincide but can produce conflict. He goes on to describe his new life and the positive change it represents in ways that reflect concepts about ‘turning points’ and transformative moments in life course narratives (Thin 2012; Bauer et al 2008):

‘The removal of all the adult responsibilities and problems is an incredibly powerful thing and makes you realise just how much these can weigh on your life and stifle your ability to truly express and be who you are. And for the first time in what feels like years I feel content, and many times actually happy. The simplicity is key’ (ID41 M35)

The idea that happiness and simplicity are linked echoes the moderate happiness narratives of Chapter Four. He goes on to tell the reader he is ‘temporarily’ living in New Zealand and acknowledges that this new-found contentment may also be short-lived: ‘I wonder sometimes how

sustainable this is'. Indeed, rather than a transformation, this could represent a "bubble" of time; from a psychoanalytical perspective, (Holloway 2006) such adult conflicts are unlikely to be resolved by escaping them. But for the time being at least, the burden of social expectation that, in his words, have stifled his ability 'to truly express and be who you are' have been lifted. ID41's predicament may also signify how, when people age, they are increasingly concerned with what Bauer (et al 2008:91) terms 'integrative growth... emphasizing learning, exploring, coming to deeper understandings, and integrating new and old perspectives on one's life'. If our attitudes to a range of meanings and goals change as we get older, do our perceptions of happiness also change with age?

Age and Changing Perceptions of Happiness

Individuals often think differently about happiness as they get older. Instead of seeing happiness as a quantity that increases or decreases at different stages in life, the key insight was how 'as people change with age, so do their ideas of happiness' (Cieslik 2017:170). Many older respondents made this point. As one put it, "I think what makes you happy changes as you go through life' (ID39 F70).

In general, older respondents depict youthfulness as a time of more intense happiness, shifting towards contentment in later years. As one puts it: 'happiness is relative to your age...when I was 17 happiness was from a good evening dancing' (ID57 F81). Emotional intensity, adventure, fun, physical exertion and romance are associated with youthful happiness. One respondent writes how 'happiness is different throughout one's life... I remember moments of elation when I was a teenager or in my twenties, madly in love and the first day of holidays'. But now, happiness is more about 'feelings of contentment' (ID70 F62). A slightly younger female respondent explores this distinction:

'There seems to be two sorts of happiness. There's an intense happiness that's a result of something exciting happening (a pleasant surprise, falling in love, looking forward to a holiday, achieving a goal) - this seemed to happen more frequently when I was young it seems to be true for many people) - and a contented happiness that seems more common with later life which comes from contact with family and friends, and living a comfortable enough life' (ID182 F51)

One of the advantages of biographical data is how it captures 'movement through time' (Hockey & James 2003:42) and provides insight about how people think differently at different points of the life-course. As Branchflower and Oswald (2008:4) admit, quantitative happiness research 'can examine only simple so-called single-item measures of well-being, so cannot allow subtle differentiation...into what might be thought of as different types of, or sides to, human happiness'. But this is problematic when making positivist claims about "happiest" age groups; different age-

based ideas about happiness, its content and scope, mean that two identical numerical self-reports of a 25 and 75 year old year old do not lend themselves to a like-for-like comparison. One male respondent charts the shifts in experiencing happiness:

‘I spent a lot of time as a teenager sailing racing dinghies. Two of us straining to keep a 12ft boat upright in a high wind and rough seas, whether or not we were at that moment in a race, was very exciting and left a feeling of accomplishment...which lingered right through the recovery stage (maybe in a bar) and on until the next race started. I was very happy sailing!’ (ID181 M75)

Physically demanding activity, competition, camaraderie, intense emotions, and the paradoxical notion that recovery entails getting drunk forms a typical youthful happiness narrative (Hockey & James 2003). Later, he gets married but still pursues a physically active life:

‘In middle-age I took up riding, with my wife. We had two horses and spent time most weekends and Summer evenings riding them out in the surrounding countryside. We both enjoyed this because we were doing it together...we could cover 5 miles in 2h 10m, but we felt it the next day’ (ID181 M75)

In middle-age, he still participates in races and delights at the fast times he achieved. But now the activity is shared with his wife and his enjoyment is contingent upon hers’. In this way, happiness becomes something more collaborative and co-produced (Thin 2012; Cieslik 2017). In addition, while achieving impressive physical feats, their bodies are starting to feel the strain. Recovery probably does not entail a night in a bar!

Now 75, he admits that he cannot relive these days ‘for want of physical strength’. His marriage is now in its fourth decade and has brought him ‘a sustained happiness that I did not know existed’. He writes about ‘the happiness I experience from the accomplishments both of my children and grandchildren and of her children and grandchildren’. Some of his happiest moments are spent ‘around our dining table with family or simply with good friends’. He has always enjoyed reading but now ‘sometimes I re-read books for example because I enjoy the dialogue particularly, or to go more slowly over the plot instead of just rushing for the end’.

In older age, the speed and scope of his life has diminished and the focus has changed. Happiness is located in domestic and family life, not physical exertion. He has also moved off centre-stage. Now the achievements of his family, rather than his own accomplishments, frame his happiness. In summary, this respondent provides three different accounts of happiness taking place at three different ages: youth, middle-age and old-age. These are difficult, at face value, to rank. They are

situated in and contingent upon the way priorities and capabilities change as we age. In this example, happiness cannot be conceptualised as a 'thing-like entity' (Thin 2012:324), something abstract and static that can be isolated and captured. It is processual, social and grounded in particular circumstances that are always changing.

Practical Wisdom

ID181 also writes about a particular depth and richness to his marital happiness in old age, of becoming more reflective compared to his younger self. This is connected to subtle changes in subjectivity and the ways 'meanings around the notion of a good life became more nuanced compared to their younger selves' (Cieslik 2017:172). As he puts it:

'in the last few years I have recognised explicitly this state of being persistently happy, built on the love we have developed over a much longer period. This change is partly a consequence of subtle changes in the way I think; I was not an introspective person when younger but a reactive one. I am more given to reflection now; I sometimes sit just thinking...' (ID181 M75)

If ageing produces subtle but beneficial changes in the way individuals perceive the world, then this does 'raise some interesting questions about whether with age and experience comes wisdom – greater or more complex insights about how to live well' (Cieslik 2017:132) and also whether, as Bauer (et al 2008:91) suggest, growing older 'charts the path to higher levels of complexity by which people can think about the self and others'. But does what Layard et al (2013:78) call 'the wisdom of maturity' actually create higher states of wellbeing? One older respondent thinks so: 'conscious happiness is something that - with a bit of luck - we can work on and develop with maturity' (ID53 F66).

ID53's comment echoes Aristotle's (2004) conceptualisation of happiness as craftsmanship. If happiness is connected to the growth of practical wisdom about how to live well, then the longer we have lived, the better at living we should become. Through ongoing action and reflection, what Aristotle (2004) terms 'praxis', increased happiness is not a greater quantity of positive emotions but becoming a better craftsman. This has ethical implications too, as one respondent muses on in response to Q5 about reliving a happiest day:

'There are moments in my life that I would like to relive only to change how awful my behaviour was not because it was a lovely time. I think I have improved with age, through counselling and reading about life. I regret being unpleasant to people because of how crap I

felt as a person at various times in my life. I would like to apologies to some people' (ID86 F49)

In this example, greater self-understanding can lead to concrete changes in the way we treat others. In other areas of life, practical wisdom accumulated through age can lead to enhanced capability. As another respondent states, 'the older I get the more confident I am that I can achieve goals that I set myself' (ID107 M55). Perhaps the key here is not greater capacity to achieve goals but setting more realistic ones in the first place, how 'older adults, compared with younger ones, have a closer fit between their ideal and actual self-perception' (Diener et al 1999:291). If 'the gap between a person's circumstances and their goals shrink with age' (Diener et al 1999:291) then according to Diener (et al 1999) this is because people readjust their goals through a process called 'accommodative coping', adapting more realistic aims to match their circumstances; this is opposed to 'assimilative coping', where people re-shape their circumstances to achieve their goals. Accommodative coping is when 'individuals learn to adapt to their strengths and weaknesses, and...quell the unfeasible aspirations of their youth' (Branchflower & Oswald 2008:5). For one respondent, this is about acknowledging 'that it is probable that I will always have these grievances, griefs and problems. Age makes you realise this' (ID198 M41). The 'beneficial effect of reduced (or more realistic) aspirations' (Layard et al 2013:78) in turn creates deeper awareness of what matters. For example, activities become enjoyable for themselves, reflecting eudemonic ideas of happiness as process rather than product (Blackburn 2001) is underlined by one respondent in response to Q2:

'making stuff...I've learned to be more patient when making mosaics or even life drawing. I've learned to love the process rather than the finished item. I've realised this with age' (ID197 M46)

As seen in ID197's comment, the "wisdom of maturity" begins before old age. However, to some degree, older individuals are forced to shift to more accommodative thinking through 'the inevitable physical and psychological decline that we will all experience – impairments to our sight, hearing, mobility, a slowing metabolism...and decline in cognitive function' (Cieslik 2017:205). As ID181 admits, he cannot sustain the exertions of his youth even if he wanted to 'for want of physical strength'. 'The inevitable restrictions of old age' (Cieslik 2017:205) means that a central focus of the happiness narratives of older respondents is their health.

Counting your (health) Blessings

One aspect of the way happiness in old age shifts towards contentment is the deliberate cultivation of a disposition called 'counting one's blessings' and this being a phrase mainly employed by older

respondents. One very important blessing is health. As one respondent puts it, happiness is 'appreciating my current reasonably good health' (ID11 F78) and this is echoed by others. This process marks a shift in thinking, of contrasting the active happiness of youth with the contentment of later life when, as horizons draw in because of reduced capacity, the motivation to seek contentment and emotional meaning increase as a result. As one respondent put it:

'my world has shrunk a lot because of ill-health in recent years, and in consequence 'active happiness' has probably be replaced by contentment' (ID101 F83)

The way health concerns take centre-stage in later life illustrate what Hockey and James (2003:50) term 'the embodiment of ageing', how the body 'is a walking memory...our bodies do provide us with ample evidence that ageing is taking place'. Part of the reason good health is so important for older people is about sustaining the activities they enjoy and produce happiness. As one puts it: 'I don't think I could enjoy my happiness in quite the same way if I didn't have my health and fitness' (ID171 F65). As a consequence, autonomy and freedom become more bodily focused in later years. For one respondent, the ability to live independently is an important blessing:

'I am fortunate to have reached this time of my life and have been healthy for most of it. I am now living with the constraints of ageing, but am happy that I can still do most things for myself' (ID108 F83)

The embodiment of ageing is also apparent in how 'the present and the future both become framed by a sense of loss- the loss of earlier competencies' (Hockey & James 2003:211). When a decline in health means that respondents are unable to do the things they used to enjoy, some compare their current life as an older person unfavourably with their former, more vigorous existence. This is broadly in line with happiness research which indicates that after a period of high average wellbeing 'between 70 and 80 worsening health begins to take its effect, and average happiness begins to decline once more' (Layard et al 2013:78). Some responses to Q2 about sources of happiness are re-directed by a few older respondents towards wistful reflections about lost capacities:

'I am getting on in years and currently have a fracture to the bone at the base of my spine which is affecting the nerves going to both of my legs. This is affecting my mobility - what I once did which gave me pleasure or made me happy like walking on the South Downs is now denied to me' (ID60 M86)

Acknowledging 'a grounding in the given of the ageing body' (Hockey & James 2003:214) leads Hockey and James (2003) to critique, as Smart (2007) does in relation to family life, the individualization thesis (Bauman 2001) that suggests how individuals are able to throw off the

shackles of socially ascribed roles and status to forge new personal identities with the implication that 'there is an unproblematic fluidity of personal identity over time' (Hockey and James 2003:12). One consequence of this is a move towards replacing 'earlier static models of the life course with a view of ageing which attributes almost sovereign power to take on whatever identity they wish' (Hockey & James 2003:8). However, this takes 'no account of the body itself as a material entity which the individual both has and is' (Hockey & James 2003:8).

While also accepting Social Constructionist perspectives that age can't be reduced to a series of bodily imperatives, Hockey & James point out that ageing bodies and attendant illnesses can be 'heavily constraining of individual choice' (Hockey & James 2003:9). This significance can be observed in the way physical health becomes the focus of responses concerning one's happiest day; for some older respondents this was when they (or significant others) recovered from ill health. As one put it, the happiest day of my life was leaving hospital fully recovered from a stroke' (ID90 F85).

However, the capacity of individuals to continually adjust their expectations in line with their circumstances (Layard 2011; Alkire 2015) means that even in adverse conditions like poor bodily health, ways of creating happiness still persist. This is illustrated in one older respondent's admiration for his wife:

'so many people I know just do not seem able to grasp what a blessing their good health is. In my wife's case five heart attacks, culminating in open heart by-pass surgery. Incredibly despite so much pain and discomfort she always had a smile for people. Especially me. She has always been ready to support our sons in their time of difficulty, and more recently our grandchildren' (ID69 M83)

This quote also reveals some of the trade-offs of happiness in old age: individuals who suffer poor health can find happiness through other sources, in this case supporting and caring for others. Despite old age and ill health, meaning can still be found through an active relational and family life. Indeed, this is not limited to existing relationships, new ones can be found, as one response illustrates:

'being able to still enjoy my life despite being 90 years old, restricted by arthritis, cannot walk far, need a stick, have many friends, I still make new ones, have a large loving family, very healthy, no real problems' (ID67 F90)

Old age and relational life

In the accounts, there are three main ways that the quality of family life is particularly significant for older people. Firstly, as studies (e.g. SCIE 2012; ONS 2019) have indicated, social isolation and

loneliness are associated not just with low wellbeing but mental health conditions and increased morbidity. For those older respondents whose children and family have moved to different regions or countries, the quality and frequency of contact with family members becomes increasingly important. As one puts it, one source of happiness is 'hearing from our children. They all live far away so we don't see them often, but a day when all three get in touch is a treat' (ID145 F78). Writing and receiving letters was one notable feature of staying in touch; the five respondents who cited letters as a source of happiness were all over 60.

A second theme of the significance of relational life in older age concerns bereavement, specifically being widowed. As one respondent states: 'before my husband died I used to experience feelings of contentment' (ID70 F62). This echoes happiness research findings where widowhood emerges as a significant predictor of an individual's self-reported life-satisfaction (ONS 2019). The depth and emotional intensity of loss is key, one widowed 72 years old female respondent writes how 'grief, bereavement, loss, unhappy, words don't describe the torment that is the depth of human feeling when faced with the ultimate wrench of the death of the ones you love' (ID184 F72). If, for one respondent, 'deep-down happiness is feeling secure, feeling that I belong in a group, that other people care for me and about me' then loss of loved ones may be particularly poignant. As she continues, 'sadly, since my husband died, feelings like this are rare' (ID76 F76).

As illustrated in Chapter Seven, bereavement is a key source of unhappiness across all age groups. The loss of loved ones for older respondents is experienced differently partly because of the consequences of loneliness but also because it contributes to the overall direction of retrenchment and narrowing horizons that cloud advanced age (Branchflower & Oswald 2008). In Chapter Five, I explored how many respondents narrate their happiest day through experiences of falling in love or meeting their future partner. For some, these symbolize heightened emotions that can't be repeated. One respondent writes about the summer she met her future husband:

'I relive that summer in my memory and regain that warm happy feeling that made life worthwhile. I don't think there could ever be a happier time in the future' (ID184 F72)

In addition, being asked to imagine a happiest day in the future illustrates the sense of what has been lost. This may provide added insight into why widowhood in older age is so detrimental to wellbeing: the loss is irreplaceable and not only in the sense of the person. For one respondent, the loss of her husband is compounded by the unhappiness she feels 'when I think of experiences which I shared with my husband that I will probably never experience again such as romance and sex' (ID70 F59). The sense here is that bereavement also marks the closing of a particular chapter. Other older

respondents narrate a more stoical (Sellars 2006) attitude to loss of loved ones in old age. Since death is inevitable, facing up to one's mortality is key. As one respondent puts it:

'the only downside to being old is that I have been to so many funerals of family and friends. But that is all part of life in general. Saying farewell to each other is inevitable' (ID68 F83)

A third aspect of family life mediated by age is how older respondents cease to be the main protagonists of their life-story (Thin 2012; Stoor 2019), describing a process of moving away from the spotlight and off centre-stage (Goffman 1990). Happiness turns towards the achievements and activities of others, adding another dimension to a more relational and other-oriented happiness explored in earlier chapters. Instead of their own weddings and graduations, now the happiest days are their children and grandchildren's weddings, graduations, milestones and achievements. As one imagines it:

'two "happiest days" yet to come might be the marriages of my granddaughter (now 19) and grandson (17). I will sit there with my wife alongside, a proud smile on my face, and a feeling of well-being' (ID176 M77)

Linked to this, "becoming" or "being" a grandparent was identified by ten older respondents as a major source of happiness, with some citing it as their happiest day. As one describes it, 'I held my first grandchild on the day he was born. Nothing could be better than that. Being a grandma is being a member, Michael Parkinson once said, 'of the Best Club In the World!' (ID49 F62). In addition, being loved and valued as grandparents is important. From one respondent, happiness is 'when my young grandchildren see me and rush towards me with their arms outstretched shouting 'Grandad' (ID74 M88).

In later life, once children have grown up, moved away and have a family of their own, becoming a grandparent may provide a renewed sense of purpose, responsibility and enjoyment. This role, like retirement, has become socially constructed as a benefit of ageing (Hockey and James 2003) Also, as people get older, the way they talk about their children changes. From the delight and heightened emotions associated with younger children observed in Chapter Five, older respondents with grown-up children often substitute this emotional intensity for pride in their children's achievements as adults. For example, one respondent is happy with 'my children for forging successful career for themselves' (ID96 F81). So too do Grandparents gain a sense of fulfilment through the achievements of Grandchildren as they grow to maturity. For one, a source of happiness is 'seeing the achievements made by the older grandchildren as they make their way dealing with failures and successes' (ID78).

Therefore, one consequence of moving “off centre-stage” is how eudemonic happiness based around concrete accomplishments become projected onto the lives of family members. However, this shift seems to be as much to do with continuity as change; the same themes narrated as being the most significant for happiness in their own lives -- relationships, achievements, education- are also considered a good or happy life for others. This shows how conceptions of the good take on a more objective, normative appraisal of what a happy life is held to be (Sayer 2011). Alternatively, it could demonstrate the strength of social conditioning concerning happiness norms (Ahmed 2010).

Retrenchment or a life-well lived?

As Cieslik (2017:2015) comments, ‘later life also involves changes in status and social relationships such as retirement...that can shrink our networks and activities that influence wellbeing’. Retirement not only has implications for social status and identity that work can provide, it can also leave people wondering about their sense of purpose. One respondent describes this:

‘I realise that as I have grown older (and retired from full time work) I am more assailed with doubts about how much I can give to other people so when someone says I have been able to help them, or give them useful advice, or make them feel better or tackle a problem better, I surprise myself by how pleased and happy it makes me’ (ID165 F67)

In helping others and, as she puts it, ‘feeling useful and valued’, the urge to create purpose and what Bauer et al (2008:97) term ‘generativity...an adult’s concern for and commitment to promoting the well-being of future generations’ is still important in later life (Steptoe & Fancourt 2019). In surveying the literature about life-course and identity, Hockey and James (2003:7) note the modern tendency of theorizing about ageing to suggest that ‘retirement from paid employment may no longer necessarily mark the symbolic retreat into old age and social exclusion’. This has challenged traditional anthropological and sociological accounts of ageing that explained ‘the life-course in terms of transition through a series of rites of passage which allowed individuals to enter into clearly differentiated roles and statuses’ (Hockey & James 2003:11).

Indeed, some older respondents do not adopt a retrenchment narrative. One 94 years old male respondent is still motivated to take on volunteering roles. Another is still ‘very happy at the seaside. and I still look forward to a swim in the sea even though I am 87 years old’ (ID153 F87). Yet while some older respondents stress the positives of ageing, this is not uniform. For one respondent, his difficulty in listing sources of happiness leads to an unfavourable comparison between present and past happiness: ‘that’s 12 things and I could probably think of more but the degree of happiness doesn’t compare with what it used to be’ (ID64 M94).

The implication of this comment is that, if happiness equates to a higher degree or intensity of feeling against which happiness in old age 'doesn't compare', then happiness in older age is something less vital. However, the age of this respondent (94) does support happiness survey findings that higher wellbeing in the first decade of retirement is followed by a decline as physical and physiological ageing takes effect (Cieslik 2017). An octogenarian respondent also contrasts present and past happiness: 'at my stage in life, really nothing makes me happy because I realise the best days are over and now is the time of retrenchment' (ID40 F86).

The sense that one's best days are in the past and 'of happiness as a receding horizon' (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:6) conditions the way some older respondents respond to Q2 about sources of happiness. One states: 'I notice this is in the present...I was happiest in my past' (ID85 F70); for another, 'at my age I tend to look back rather than forward' (ID176 M77). Other responses align with traditional depictions of ageing as retreat (Hockey & James 2003). One, for example, describes her current life as one of comparative disengagement: 'I am happy to watch TV all evening. I used to go out every night, to Labour party meetings, Council meetings, drinking in the British Legion and never watched TV' (ID184 F72). However, disengagement from an active life is not necessarily a cause for regret. As she continues:

'Still mentally engaged with what's going on in the country through the media but playing no active part....am all round happy with my life, I have no worries, I can go anywhere and do anything I want but I like my own backyard. I have had such a busy life, raising the boys, getting involved in local affairs, (i.e. youth club, church women's group, politics, school board) as well as having a career that has given me a very comfortable pension. It seems that everything I joined I finished up running and organizing and now I don't want any more responsibility...so now I don't belong to anything' (ID184 F72)

Rather than seeing the retreat in terms of loss, shrinking scope and speed could simply mark the natural end of the journey. If, as Bauer (et al 2008) suggests, life-course narratives tend towards themes of growth and development, perhaps a holistic version of the growth narrative lies in the overall balance of active engagement followed by decline and retreat. ID184 has been very engaged and taken on a lot of responsibility, now comes the inevitable retrenchment from this active life. She enjoys being able to do as she likes and there is a sense of coherence (Thin 2012) in capping her busy adult life with the peacefulness and solitariness of old age. In addition, her reflections demonstrate a longer view of happiness over time, countering the current methodological insistence of situating happiness within the present moment (Thin 2012). A more holistic appreciation encompasses the entire lifespan across a broad range of experience. A eudemonic theme about conceptualizing and

capturing the 'good life' is also apparent. For Aristotle (2004), only at the end of one's life could a person's happiness be judged, taking into account all that came before. Other older respondents adopt this stance. As one puts it: 'I feel I have a had a good life in that I enjoyed my profession, married a wonderful man, had 2 amazing children and now have 3 grandchildren' (ID12 F81).

In contrast to utilitarian ideas of the hedonic calculus (McMahon 2013), these whole-life evaluations prioritise meaning and relationships over a weighing of positive and negative affect. This is captured poignantly by one respondent who describes the death of his Grandmother. Her deathbed remarks show the temporal bandwidth of happiness moving beyond the present moment, transcending even the pain she is currently experiencing:

'I think it would be wonderful if my last day alive could be the happiest. When my grandmother was dying, very near the end, she had a visitor who broke down and sobbed to see how thin and frail she had become and to think how little time remained to her. My grandmother took the woman's hand and told her she should not be sad. I have had a wonderful life: a wonderful husband, two truly fine sons...I have never wanted for anything that mattered. I have lived my span in good health till now, and I am happy' (ID80 M66)

Foreboding and Mortality

While acknowledging the peaceful acceptance invoked by some respondents when considering their mortality, foreboding and dread characterise the outlook of others. One respondent is unhappy about 'getting older and knowing that the time I have left with my husband is getting shorter by the day' (ID91 F63) while another simply states 'the thought of dying is bad' (ID156 F61). The notion of 'human beings continually haunted by their own mortality' (Hockey & James 2003:50) may be a staple of life-course literature but happiness research seems rather coy about this. Although, as previously noted, happiness data suggests that self-reported life-satisfaction decreases when physical decline takes effect (Layard 2011), the reasons behind self-reports are not solicited in surveys. Furthermore, the temporal orientation of these surveys is fixed in the present, assuming that individuals evaluate their happiness from their current perspective. But as happiness can be viewed from 'multiple temporal vantage points' (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:15), feelings of foreboding and dread about the future can affect present-state evaluations.

These feelings are often triggered by both the reality and idea of physical decline and the fear, as one respondent puts it, 'that this will get worse as I get older and am less able to get out and about' (ID76 F74). They are also triggered by the illness and deaths of one's partner and friends. One respondent writes that learning of the death of others 'reminds me of my own mortality' (ID39 F70).

For another, what she describes as her ‘general feeling of anxiety and foreboding’ (ID40 F86) is connected to ‘seeing my friends and relations sicken and die, or lose their reason; my own deterioration in health and ability’. As indicated by the last excerpt, more relational and other-oriented depictions of happiness can be woven into the narrative of decline and deterioration. One respondent is worried about the ‘loss of faculties’ as he grows older but also how this would involve being ‘a burden to my family’ (ID129 M74). For another respondent, her key concern is her husband’s health:

‘I think my husband's memory is starting to go. I dread the consequences of this as we looked after his mother with dementia for six years. I know what it is like’ (ID123 F74)

However, she reconciles her and her husband’s mortality by adopting the eudemonic “holistic” stance explored above, looking back over her life and writing that ‘on the whole I have had a very happy life and am grateful for that’. On this theme, other respondents reframe the reality or prospect of ill health as an opportunity to appreciate what one has, reflecting the moderate Epicurean Hedonics (O’Keefe 2014) introduced in Chapter Two. Interestingly, it is not only older people who reflect on ageing and decline as foreboding. As Hockey & James suggest (2003:4), if ‘age is integral to our identity, then we need to recognise that it is also frequently in potential conflict with it’. One female respondent grapples with the symbolism of being 40:

‘I hate being 40, to the point that I can't say the word. The whole notion of being 40 makes me feel very unhappy. In some respects I should be very happy, as I have the most wonderful family and friends, and a great social life. But the unhappiness of never having been able to have found anyone to settle down with, and never having a family of my own, plays on my mind constantly. It is now, at this time of life, at 40, that I have never felt so lonely and unhappy about life and the prospect of my future’ (ID95 F40)

Age, happiness and social Identity

ID95’s unhappiness at getting older links to culturally gendered narratives critiqued by feminist scholars (e.g. Ahmed 2010) about how women are bombarded with harrying messages to achieve some aesthetic or physical standard. The body consciousness expressed almost exclusively by female respondents overlaps with themes of physical decline. Even seemingly positive reflections were underscored by anxiety, as illustrated by the following two quotes:

‘Pleasant surprises. such as going to the Bobbie Brown counter and having my face made up, being pleased with the result’ (ID11 F78)

‘looking in the mirror after a visit to the hairdresser and thinking I don't look too bad’ (ID40 F86)

Through what Hockey & James (2003:43) term ‘the cult of youthfulness’ tied to successful maintenance of youthful appearance, ‘the meaning of the older body for women in a society where the youthful body is everywhere’ (Hockey & James 2003:133) is particularly fraught. One dimension of this is how ‘hair, skin and body weight are a focus for self-monitoring throughout middle age...an almost moral obligation to make sure their bodies do not conform too soon to the characteristics of old age’ (Hockey and James 2003:14). This can be seen in the following response to Q2 about sources of happiness:

‘Looking in the mirror and feeling confident with the way I look, my hair or the outfit I'm wearing. I am not overconfident in my looks especially now I am getting near to 50!’ (ID150 F49)

The constraint of socially structured gender norms for older female respondents is counter-balanced by a powerful case of the life experience of one 90 year old. She reflects on her decision to take a teacher training qualification in the 1950s, emphasising how this decision bucked contemporary social taboos and expectations about gender roles. This is also an example of a key decision or turning point (Thin 2012) that made a significant long-term contribution to her happiness.

‘I still feel very strongly against the pressures of the previous generation. I had stepped out of their expectations, maybe “beyond the pale” by going to college and becoming a teacher’ (ID52 F90)

This excerpt shows how individuals sometimes grapple with and resist social expectations in order to create self-fulfilment (Cieslik 2017). These struggles always take place within specific socio-cultural contexts, and the rich biographical data offered in these accounts plot an individual’s journey as part of a wider narrative of social attitudes changing over time. She feels a strong connection with her niece, who she describes as ‘in tune with me’, who went to university and also became a teacher but did not have to overcome the same obstacles. She calls her niece ‘a modern woman’, approvingly. In direct contrast, another older female respondent states that ‘if I could re-live my life again, it would be back in the 50s when I was so content’ because of her role as housewife and mother: ‘all I ever wanted was family and my own house together with a loving man. No way was I ambitious at work, and to be a housewife was fantastic’ (ID68 F83).

This response also shows how social class mediates responses. ID68’s biography is one of both working-class struggle and increasing opportunities. Her account shows how state policies and socio-

economic conditions can form the backdrop of happiness narratives, as Cieslik (2017) has shown through eliciting happiness accounts from working-class men in the North East of England. Through access to council housing, she escaped what she describes as the 'slums':

'I know that the happiest day of my life was when the council handed me the keys to my own front door in Brentwood. Being born and raised in East London, I was used to the dirt and grime that was part of the "slums"' (ID68 F83)

Her enthusiasm for escaping the inner city contradicts Wilmott & Young's (2007) classic post-war account of how suburbanisation and new council estates were detrimental to family and community life, chiming with Clapson's (2010) research on the benefits of suburban life. The happiest day of her life was when she was given a council house with 'my own front door'. Two other biographical narratives of older, working-class respondents are also striking in how they track happiness in the context of wider social conditions. This can be seen through one recollection about the struggle to make ends meet in early adult life:

'We have been fortunate all our married life to live at pleasant locations. Homes with all modern cons, pleasant neighbours, enough space and plenty of local facilities...not exactly up market, but certainly a location that many living on so called sink estates would love to enjoy. Mind it comes at a cost. In our early days our home consumed every penny of my wages. Nothing to spare for cars, expensive holidays, washing machines, television etc. No designer clothes or new clothes of any sort for five years. Quite a sacrifice for a young twenty something bride. Hard at times but eventually worth all the effort' (ID69 M83)

His comments reflect working-class struggles but also themes of working-class aspiration and embourgeoisement (something that Savage (2007) has identified in his longitudinal analysis of post-war Mass Observation accounts). As with ID68's account, in signalling the particular sacrifice endured by his wife in not being able to purchase a range of domestic consumer goods or clothes, this comment also reflects traditional gender views expressed by some older working-class respondents. Similar themes can also be seen in one 92 years old male's account of financial struggle and long working hours in the building trade, supplemented by his wife's part-time income as a school dinner lady: 'over the years we have had some hard times...Such as me working on many actions over 12 hours a day. The wife working in a school kitchen to help with the rent' (ID77 M92).

The extent to which this account reflects traditional gender norms is illustrated when he goes on to describe how his wife 'had to drop the school work' after the birth of their sons, and, reflecting on retirement and the perils of boredom, states: 'retiring after an active life leaves one (man or woman)

in a vacuum. If married the woman still has the housework, so the man has to pitch in to help'. To call these assumptions about gender roles old-fashioned would be an understatement, yet the reader is still left with an impression of equal partnership, when, touching on themes explored in Chapter 5 about successful, long-term relationships, he ends his response with 'the wife and I have always worked together. THIS IS HAPPINESS'.

These class narratives also reflect rostrums concerning "respectable" working classes, who, through embodying respectable virtues like hard work and self-discipline, position themselves as worthy of the respect, recognition and approval of social elites (Watt 2006). Other virtues of respectability include frugality, moderation and an avoidance of conspicuous or reckless consumption (Attfield 2016). ID69, a Working-class octogenarian male, takes pride in work and financial prudence, contrasting this with what he sees as more reckless and entitled current attitudes to spending:

'It is comforting to know all the bills, commitments, demands on our pocket is covered. My wife and I have always abhorred unnecessary debt. Money among other issues, has been the cause of our son's messy divorces. They both acquired wives, who like so many young people today, liked to spend money they did not have' (ID69 M83)

Again, the gendered language of 'acquiring' a wife is notable, particularly as part of an anti-materialistic critique! He goes on to touch upon themes of respectability (Watt 2006) by emphasising that 'I have never been unemployed' and recounts the challenging working environment of the motor transport industry where he did his apprenticeship for 'a demanding employer' and 'not the sort of working environment many can tolerate'. These workplace comments also form part of a wider cultural critique as he goes on to cite modern employers 'complaining about the quality of potential employees'. This dovetails with his own management experience of young employees who felt 'hard done by having to be work at 7.30am'. Having challenged one employee about his negative attitude, 'this individual banged my desk and said "I know my rights"'.

However, as much as this signals a declinist lament about public virtue (explored in Chapter Eight), this respondent's biography is also a reflection of progressive changes in UK society in the third quarter of the Twentieth Century (Dorling 2012). He begins work as what he calls 'a horny handed mechanic' but by retirement occupies a management role in Local Government. His career development is perhaps an example of the greater opportunities and social mobility of the post-war decades (Dorling 2012).

ID68's account is also a story of shifts in social attitudes (BSAS 2018). Though (as previously explored) nostalgic about her contented role as housewife in the 1950s, by retirement 40 years later

she is a Shop Manager, and elsewhere in her response describes her pride about her granddaughter, the 'lovely girl' who 'has grown into a very modern young woman and very independent'. While she may have been happy with her housewife role, this isn't necessarily one she would prescribe to the current generation.

Carefree Youth?

Older respondents frequently looked back to their youth as a period of discovery dotted with key events and achievements. But what do younger respondents themselves say is important or characteristic about their happiness? One theme that tallied with the recollections of older respondents is how happiness is experienced as and associated with excitement and having fun. The importance of socialising and shared experiences cuts across all age groups; however, it is often associated by younger respondents with clubbing, partying and drinking. One writes about the happiness she gets from 'going dancing with friends' and one of her happiest days was 'having great fun and partying in Cuba' (ID37 F38), also showing how foreign travel has become an important rite of passage in young adulthood (Hockey and James 2003).

Respondents from all ages and sexes cited alcohol as an activity they enjoyed. The difference for younger respondents is the way in which drinking forms a part of exuberant socialising. One enjoys 'getting a bit pissed and dancing like a fool' (ID19 F33); for another, drinking becomes part of a shared ritual that strengthens friendships:

'Hangovers are a sign of a good night out. Everything is funnier when you're hungover. I usually stay with friends after a night out and we wake up, 3 in a bed, piece together the night before, eat beans on toast, drink tea and watch bad television' (ID83 F26)

The drinking that takes place in the lives of these younger respondents seems rather different in tone and focus from the way in which older respondents write about alcohol, having in a gin and tonic in the garden with their partner or 'drinking a really good red wine usually a rioja, particularly Martinez Bujanda wines which are something to live for' (ID78). Sexual relations are another domain that underline both the continuities and discontinuities of happiness across different ages. Sex is still a valued part of relationships for older couples. Sex is also important for younger respondents but in ways more about experimentation and excitement – one describes a source of happiness as 'girls/romance/sex' (ID116 M25). This excitement is also about the anticipation rather than the act itself, highlighted by one respondent describing a source of happiness as 'receiving a message from someone you fancy' (ID7 F38).

One younger respondent describes unhappiness as ‘the pressure to be happy’ and writes about spending ‘so much time thinking about how I should be a happier person that I forget to enjoy the moments that make me happy’ (ID87 F31). Echoing themes explored in Chapter Four about limited expectations and moderate happiness, one younger respondent states that ‘being moderately happy most of the time is a better aim’ (ID19 F33) and she is one of a number of younger respondents questioning and problematising the nature of happiness as striving or as a pursuit. These voices caution against a literal reading of sociological theorizing, particularly concerning younger generations, where striving to be happy takes the form of psychological self-governance that suppresses negative emotions (Furedi 2004). Instead they mostly echo Fox (2004) and Smart’s (2007) contention that young people in the UK are not in general a demographic bent on unconventionality and excess, as attitudes data (about marriage, for example) has shown (BSAS 2019).

One of the more surprising findings of the UK Wellbeing Index is that young adults are the age group most likely to report higher levels of loneliness (ONS 2019). In addition, as Cieslik (2017) shows in his empirical research, young adulthood can also be a time of anxiety, having to make important decisions about relationships, work and education without knowing if they are the right ones and what their future consequences may be. One female respondent characterises her current age as a time of anxiety and stress:

‘my emotional landscape has changed beyond all recognition since adulthood and I have never felt true happiness since I was about 18. That’s when the negative feelings took over and I stopped being care-free’ (ID25 F27)

This comparison of a 27 year old’s ‘anxious’ self with their 18 years old self’s ‘carefree’ existence is significant; even at a relatively young age, individuals lament a lost, care-free existence in similar ways to older respondents. It seems that you’re never too young to yearn for a more innocent time! While some younger respondents depict happiness as located in exhilarating and fun activities, this doesn’t mean they are not also beset by anxieties and uncertainties, and, in the case of three of the respondents in their twenties, suffering from depression, underlining the way in which youth mental illness is a growing problem in the UK (ONS 2018). Indeed, far from seeing his condition as one set against the carefree experiences of his peers, one respondent suggests that anxiety and excessive ruminating are actually intrinsic to this particular age:

‘it is a sad quality in my nature to dwell on the things that make me unhappy rather than happy. Perhaps that is a symptom of being in my 20s, and will pass’ (ID180 M28)

Therefore, there is a danger of making binary distinctions between youthful happiness as excitement and old age as contentment. By no means are the accounts of younger respondents ones of uncomplicated hedonism. In addition to issues previously explored, they all write about happiness in ways that depict a balance between work and fun, enjoyment and commitments. However, there is undoubtedly a theme emerging that happiness is something shaped in the context of particular stages of life. Although age-based differences in happiness can to a degree be compared, they are intrinsic to particular and unique stages in life and are not wholly commensurable. Connected to the problem of measuring happiness as a numerical self-report and the difficulty of comparing like for like, if John's "7" out of "10" can be very different to Martin's "7", then comparing John, 71's "7" with younger John, 25's "7" is also problematic because of the mutability of meanings of happiness across the life-course: one's expectations and outlook may be quite different at different stages of life. These appreciations of different qualities of happiness contingent on age not only problematise the idea that numerical depictions of happiness can be separated from the way people perceive happiness but illustrate potentially important changes about the nature of happiness as people age.

Summary

How age influences personal happiness has been one of the most noted findings of Happiness Studies, particularly the "U-shape" identified by Branchflower & Oswald (2008) that suggests that young adulthood and retirement age are two optimum periods of happiness. This chapter also shows how age and happiness emerged as an important theme for MO respondents, and their accounts provides an opportunity to gain a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of the relationship between age and happiness. In particular, the idea that happiness, both in experience and perception, changes as we age.

To some degree, the findings correspond with age-based happiness literature (e.g. Layard et al 2013; ONS 2019): many respondents made a clear distinction between a youthful, excited, intense and forward-looking happiness as opposed to a more contented, family-oriented happiness in older age as horizons recede. In later years, while often still active and engaged in civic and community life, focus shifts towards health and physical capacity (one's own but also others') while ambitions and key plot moments like weddings or graduations that characterise the 'growth narrative' (Bauer et al 2008) of life course studies become relocated to younger family members. Insight into issues that quantitative data is unable to capture, particularly psychological dimensions to older age like foreboding, were also explored.

One problematic aspect of a dichotomy between young-intense-happiness versus older-contented happiness is the way younger people themselves wrote about these issues. Reflecting some issues

identified in the UK wellbeing index (ONS 2019) about high rates of anxiety and loneliness among young people, while there are certainly many more gregarious and intense happiness engagements identified by those younger respondents, youth is not a carefree age. Often beset by anxiety and pressure, some of which is socially produced, some younger respondents also produced quite moderate accounts of their expectations of happiness in the years to come. This suggests that the way in which young adults conceptualise happiness is not strikingly different to older age groups.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

A key advantage of an interpretive approach to happiness research is a powerful insight into what matters to people (Sayer 2011). Echoing Thin's (2014) idea of happiness as 'a rubric for the good life', happiness is something both experienced and evaluated in relation to an individual's key concerns (in their lives and wider society): what is most desirable and worthwhile, and what is more or less conducive to flourishing.

The accounts weave between descriptions of personal experience and reflections about the nature of happiness. formed primarily of what Hookway (2018:107) calls 'do-it yourself' morality, drawn from personal experience and observation but also informed by a range of 'public repertoires' (Savage 2007) including popular culture and news media. Through a variety of 'idiosyncratic root metaphors' (Thin 2012:327), happiness is narrated as a secret, a struggle, a partner, a paradox, among others. Although this underlines the variety of ways individuals conceive of and pursue happiness, in responding to my four research questions outlined in Chapter Three, five overarching themes emerged: complexity, meaning, interdependence, age and social unhappiness.

Exploring the five Key themes: Complexity

My first research question asked how individuals understand happiness in the context of theoretical happiness traditions, particularly the contrast between hedonic and eudemonic concepts. As explored in Chapter Four, many respondents spoke about happiness as relating to a wide variety of ordinary, everyday pleasures. But feeling good was rarely seen as an aim in itself. Because utilitarian philosophy underpins happiness survey research (Austin 2015), it is important to outline some key objections to the pursuit of greater hedonic happiness identified in the analysis of the MO accounts.

First, knowability. Happiness was often characterised in the response by its ephemeral or fleeting quality and also by the mutability of experiences and understanding over time — something deemed happy in the present moment could be retrospectively analysed as misguided or even harmful. Equally, unhappy episodes can have silver linings (Cieslik 2017) and tough times can help us to grow as individuals. Second, holism, particularly an informal empiricist (Fox 2004) or "naturalistic" sense that a 'normal' life-course is interwoven by periods and episodes of happiness and unhappiness (and subsequently) the significance of happiness can really only be appreciated by having experienced its opposite. Third, happiness as paradox: pleasure is a by-product of experience and cannot be aimed at directly, echoing McMahon's (2013) contention that the best way to find happiness is to look for something else. A fourth objection is related to virtue. This is partly about ethics and treating people well but also, echoing eudemonic thinking, individuals often seek ends for reasons above and

beyond the sake of how it will make them feel (Seligman 2011) They do this because they are driven more by meaning and purpose than positive affect, though this pursuit may feel good.

As underlined in Chapter Two and captured in Chapters Four and Six, a feature of eudemonic happiness (Aristotle 2004; Sayer 2011) involving the pursuit of a life of meaning and purpose is not only to risk unhappiness but, in the process, to encounter difficult emotions such as anxiety, incompetence and frustration along the way. Therefore, a further aspect of holism was the way in which unhappiness is embedded in the struggle or 'praxis' of everyday life where individuals have to make choices in the pursuit of a meaningful life within conditions of uncertainty (Sayer 2011; Cieslik 2014). The open nature of choices actors have to grapple with highlights 'the nature of our condition as needy, vulnerable beings, suspended between things as they are and as they might become, for better or worse, and as we need or want them to become' (Sayer 2011:4).

Other happiness traditions featured in the responses. Stoicism was unique in it being a theory that respondents explicitly engaged with. Stoicism was linked to the idea of equanimity (Sellars 2006): accepting that negative experiences and emotions are one's "lot" in life and managing them as and when they arise, echoing Cieslik's (2017) empirical work. Life can bite and surprise you, seems to be a key message of these accounts, so accept the limits of personal control. This complicates a purely individualistic reading of Western happiness narratives (Mathews 2012), as the implication is that individuals are not solely responsible for their wellbeing (Walker & Kavedžija 2015). Fate and luck, two concepts associated with the ancient Greek tradition, still resonate.

Since the good can be fragile (Nussbaum 2001), then more moderate expectations of happiness should be adopted, resonating strongly with the ideas of Epicurean Philosophy explored in Chapter Four. Reflecting Epicurus' (2013) 'sufficiency maxim', contentment is as much about an active stance as an affective reaction, about cultivating gratitude, cherishing one's existing goods and 'counting one's blessings'. This moderate idea of happiness, as well as reflecting some of the psychological research into happiness, particularly the 'hedonic treadmill' (Layard 2011), was also mobilised as an explicit or tacit rejection of modern social conditions and social mores. The pressure to achieve happiness as a moral good (Walker & Kavedžija 2015; Ahmed 2010) was critiqued as an impossible burden, based on a 'naturalistic' premise that conditions of living preclude such rosy and unblemished outcomes. The idea of happiness as contentment was presented as something of an alternative to this illusory quality of happiness.

This meant that respondents stood at a quite complicated position to sociological happiness theorizing. On the one hand, they offer far more nuanced and moderate expectations of happiness than is depicted in key concepts like 'individualization' (Bauman 2001) and 'therapeutic culture'

(Furedi 2004) where modern subjects are conceptualised as technicians working to accentuate positive and suppress negative feelings. On the other, their critical social commentary about what they perceive to be dominant social mores concur with these rather pessimistic sociological tropes.

Meaning

In relation to my second research question about which sources of happiness have most significance, the responses about different types of pleasures highlighted a historical fault-line in happiness theorizing, where utilitarian principles of everyone's pleasures being equal, attractively democratic on the surface, contrast with the seemingly common-sense retort of eudemonic happiness that some pleasures, on the basis of ethics, self-development and fulfilling potential, are better than others. The experiential salience (Thin 2012) of the eudemonic tradition to happiness can be seen in many of the reasons provided by respondents as to why certain activities, relationships and conduct are associated with a happy life: relationships, creativity, achievement and learning. This insight into how subjects differentially weight and parse sources of happiness in relation to their quality and/or depth also highlights a significant advantage of the qualitative method.

Furthermore, themes of meaning and achievement support the psychological work on 'Flow' (Csikszentmihalyi 1997) and other eudemonic psychological theories (Ryan & Deci 2000; Ryff & Singer 2008; Bauer et al 2008): the richest present-state experiences are often those where full engagement, skill development and the loss of self-consciousness are combined. But the added dimension of elevation and the experience of the sublime required a broader theoretical framework to do justice to the power of some these uplifting moments and episodes that respondents described. Analysing these experiences through Schopenhauer's (2012) concept of the sublime and Haidt's (2003) work on elevation provided some insight into this intriguing and under-explored dimension to happiness where feelings of awe and unity are generated. These experiences were located in creative pursuits, arts and music but also in ordinary moments like being in nature.

As explored in Chapter Three, class analysis of the cohort revealed a mostly middle-class demographic often with highbrow cultural tastes. This was reflected in the accounts through the sources of happiness deemed as being of higher or deeper quality than others and also by a sense of estrangement towards the apparently frivolous and materialistic cultural engagements of younger people. At the same time, the impassioned form this highbrow engagement often took was somewhat out of keeping with the otherwise generally moderate content and tone of the accounts and, in class terms, not at all the disassociated and discerning cerebral engagement with cultural practices that Savage (2015) identifies as a key feature of the highbrow middle class aesthetic.

Interdependence

Themes emerging from my second research question, connecting sources of happiness to what matters most to people, underscored the social nature of happiness, inextricably bound up with our most significant relationships with others, echoing both quantitative (ONS 2019) and qualitative studies (Cieslik 2017). One reason was the difference between fleeting moments and more continuous forms of happiness that family, friends and partners can provide. A related aspect driving interdependent happiness is vulnerability and need for the care, love, respect and security that others offer (while not forgetting the enjoyment and fun derived from these relationships).

On the flipside, much unhappiness also has interdependent features. Bereavement and childhood trauma can have an enduring negative effect. In addition, attachment to others and the sensitivity and vulnerability to loss and hurt this brings, shows how binary distinctions of happiness and unhappiness fail to capture the open-ended nature of human endeavours: things can go well or badly and the pursuit of happiness can be understood through Aristotle's (2004) idea of praxis: a processual phenomenon grounded in the reflexivity, practice and mutual monitoring of daily life 'in which fallibly but persistently we seek what seems to be the best in terms of flourishing' (Cieslik 2014:10).

One sociological significance of relational happiness was how committed respondents were to others in spite of the challenges often presented by these attachments. Long-term relationships, domestic affairs and wider family life were rarely conveyed by respondents as perfect. Thus, Smart (2007) and Hockey and James' (2003) critique of the 'individualization' thesis (Beck & Beck 1992; Bauman 2001) seemed apposite. Despite a cultural emphasis on personal choice and inclination, individuals do not discard relationships lightly.

Furthermore, a focus on the happiness and wellbeing of others, particularly family members, invokes a more social and "other-oriented" idea of happiness than something that individuals possess for themselves. Flourishing, for many respondents, is dependent on their social attachments and sense of belonging to a wider entity. As one respondent put it, 'I tend to be happiest when I feel like I am part of a pack and have a function in that pack and am valued for being part of it'. This more collaborative understanding of happiness also signals how 'flourishing entails a sense that one's pursuits serve a larger purpose' (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi 2003:94).

As explored in Chapter Nine, this social embeddedness can be expanded to a conception of the socially implicated, concerned citizen whose conception of personal happiness is connected to 'society in its happiness' (Mathews 2012). This is connected to the flourishing of institutions,

practices and causes that individuals 'hold dear' (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:1) but is also associated with a more universal aspect of concern for generalised others, of the capacity for compassion or sympathy (Smith 2013; Nussbaum 1999) that derives from imagining oneself into the situation of the other.

Therefore, individual concern cuts across personal and social domains. Vices such as selfishness, greed, and inconsideration are sources of unhappiness in everyday social interaction but also in the conduct of banks and politicians, signalling a degree of symmetry between normative appraisals of personal life and wider society. These normative appraisals are part of what Sayer (2004) understands as the ongoing, everyday evaluative stances that actors adopt towards the choices, behaviours and practices of themselves and others. These are not cool or distanced judgements but grounded in what Sayer (2011:2) terms 'emotional reason, analyses pertaining to matters of harm and justice directly related to wellbeing, one's own or that of others.

Age

My third research question asked how individual characteristics mediate happiness. One key finding was how beliefs about happiness change with age. Although the significance of contentment featured across the age spectrum, the idea of happiness as contentment was particularly emphasised by older people. Although this stance is partly a corollary of diminished capacity and a sense that the time of being centre-stage has passed (so sources of happiness gravitate towards others), it also marks the wisdom respondents gain as they age and reflect on their experiences (Cieslik 2017). By contrast, the happiness accounts of younger respondents generally focused on more intense and socially and cultural gregarious sources of happiness. This problematises a standardising happiness measurement which makes like for like comparisons between all individuals of whatever age (Thin 2012) and then ranks particular age groups as happier than others.

However, while distinctions between age categories are important, on closer inspection the picture becomes less clear. Firstly, it is older respondents as opposed to younger ones who most emphatically convey the idea that youth is a time of exuberance and discovery. Echoing UK data about anxiety levels and ethnographic studies (Fox 2004; Baggin 2008), some younger respondents portrayed young adulthood as a time of anxiety and uncertainty. In addition, their reflections about the nature of happiness revealed fairly conventional and moderate aspirations, countering sociological theorizing (Furedi 2004) about the relentless quest for pleasure exhibited by younger generations. Furthermore, the simplifying distinction in (some) age-based happiness research that a kind of halcyon earlier old age is followed by the unhappy experience of deterioration and decline

doesn't take into account how foreboding and morbidity preoccupy currently healthy older respondents in their sixties and seventies.

When happiness is viewed by older respondents as something confined to the past, this doesn't necessarily mean they are unhappy in the present. This is because the scope of happiness stretches across the life-course, chiming with Aristotle's (2004) ideas of broadening the concept of happiness beyond one's current emotional, cognitive or physical state. The image of the dying Grandmother (depicted in Chapter Nine), in some pain, declaring that she is happy because of all the good things that have come before is a poignant example of the way happiness can be understood as a whole-life phenomenon, problematising the orthodoxy of conceptualising happiness as a present-state evaluation.

Body-consciousness, as Hockey and James (2003) suggest, is another important aspect of age-based narratives, both in the actual and the imaginary. For older respondents, reasonable physical health is associated with what one can be content with or grateful about. Equally, their ideas about future happiness are often framed by bodily capacity. Body-consciousness also reveals how dimensions of age-based happiness is mediated by gender. Older female respondents become preoccupied with bodily aesthetic and appearance in ways their male counterparts seemingly do not, echoing Hockey & James's (2003) contention that female ageing is an often fraught process of self-maintenance to accommodate societal valorisation of the youthful female body, a point that Ahmed (2010) also pursues in her sociological critique of how happiness norms both reflect and entrench social discrimination faced by particular groups.

Social Unhappiness

A strong theme of unhappiness with society, mainly in response to Q6: 'is there anything that makes you unhappy?' is connected to my fourth research question about exploring the social dimensions of happiness. This seems to corroborate the contentions of Walker & Kavedžija (2015) and Sayer (2011) about how happiness is used diagnostically by agents to appraise what is good or bad about what is happening not only in one's own life but also in wider society.

One thing is clear: these social dimensions matter and are part of how half the cohort responded to questions about *their* happiness. They were not asked to make any social commentary. That a question, 'what makes you unhappy?' directed at the level of individual life is reconfigured by those individuals in a way that transcends their own circumstances, may further underline a more socially situated idea of happiness as concerned citizens and not just private individuals.

“Social unhappiness” took three inter-related forms: alienation and dissatisfaction with political structures, a declinist critique of socio-cultural norms and practices, and attitudes of “helpless concern” concerning these issues. General disaffection with political structures was identified. Although most of the cohort positioned themselves on the political left (Curtice 2018), many respondents also adopted social conservative or communitarian perspectives about social obligations and respect for traditional norms. This echoes recent political theorizing and psephology (Norris & Inglehart 2016; Curtice 2018) that shows how an additional communitarian/liberal axis orthogonal to the left/right ideological spectrum is transforming and disrupting democratic structures in the West, signalled by events like EU Referendum amidst a broader trend of rising populism.

The MO respondents are disproportionately older, middle-class and non-urban, and their appraisals of moral norms signalled towards what Eatwell and Goodwin (2018) perceive as a backlash against liberal cosmopolitanism. This included critiques of selfishness, materialism and untrammelled individual license, embedded both in elites and in ordinary social settings. Because of this sense of estrangement and antagonism to modern mores amongst an older, ethnic-majority demographic, Skey’s work (2011) on security and national belonging was useful in relation to the idea that ‘ontological security’ (Giddens 1991) is predicated on a ‘relatively consistent and hence taken for granted everyday realm’ (Skey 2011:18) where ‘spatial and temporal regularities contribute to this sense of continuity and stability’ (Skey 2013:89). This previously taken for granted everyday realm is disrupted and transformed and subsequently an important dimension of ‘social unhappiness’ was the discontinuity between past and present conditions.

In addition, the sociological significance of social unhappiness is one bound up with objective social conditions. Here, the concrete links between personal wellbeing and social structures found in the accounts, the sources of personal unhappiness explored in Chapter Seven and also the wider social suffering perceived in Chapter Eight can be seen to be direct products of external environments, showing how happiness is dependent on social conditions in addition to one’s own efforts. In particular, those struggling with poverty, disability and chronic ill health, conditions directly influenced by public and social policy and service provision, find a good life hard to achieve. In many ways, the cohort demographic is associated with high levels of wellbeing identified in national wellbeing data (ONS 2019): a higher proportion of over 65s but few in their eighties or nineties, dwelling in the South of England but not in cities, often possessing higher education qualifications and working in mainly middle-class occupations. But a small yet significant minority of the cohort are living in more precarious conditions. In particular, dovetailing with UK survey findings (ONS 2019),

the unemployed and long-term disabled appear as the unhappiest. Therefore, data analysis highlighted significant differences in wellbeing that in turn highlight wider social inequalities.

The fluctuating circumstances, constraints and opportunities identified in happiness accounts that encompassed a wider temporal life-course perspective provided rich insight about how individual biographies interact with macro-social conditions. For example, the way respondents monitored and worried about their finances; on the one hand, worrying about income is a highly personal matter; on the other, it is a wider social issue pertaining to levels of wages and employment. In addition, 2013/14 when respondents were writing these accounts were years of widespread concerns about higher costs of living and stagnating wages affecting not just the poor but the middle-classes (Resolution Foundation 2014; Stuckler et al 2017).

The interaction between individual happiness and social conditions underlines the socially- situated nature of wellbeing (Sayer 2011). For different individuals at different points of their lives, the availability of housing, the ability to be promoted at work, gaining key qualifications, making ends meet for those struggling with disability or unemployment, and being treated with respect by service-providers- all require social conditions to facilitate these pursuits of what respondents perceive as contributing to a happy and good life.

In eudemonic theory, personal freedom and the ability to flourish is always exercised within a wider social framework that can either constrain or encourage the ability to satisfy a range of material (income, housing, jobs) and psychological (belonging, esteem, relatedness) needs (Ryan & Deci 2000; Maslow 1943). Therefore, the significance of favourable social and external conditions and the fair distribution of social goods lies in the way 'human wellbeing is fragile, existing only in potentia; adverse circumstances can threaten this' (Archer 2001:24). Therefore, when respondents were asked 'what does happiness mean to you?', their responses often spill over into more objective and generalising appraisals about the social implications of personal happiness. As one respondent put it, 'lack is fairly likely to be the reason for anyone's unhappiness isn't it? Lack of food, money, security, good health' (ID63 F48).

Drawing attention to the 'desirable qualities of a really good society' (Thin 2014:2) would entail building on themes identified in Chapter Eight about the role of policy in ensuring basic needs are met so that individuals are able to pursue a life they value. This emphasis on both the satisfaction of basic needs and autonomy (explored in Chapter Seven) positions the role for policy within the Capabilities (Nussbaum & Sen 2003) and Human Needs (Gough & Doyal 1991; Dean 2009) theoretical traditions.

In this respect, evidence (e.g. Lelkes 2013) stating Government interventions in personal wellbeing are most effective in preventing suffering (rather than making people happy) by ensuring basic needs, like a decent income, are being met, is supported in these accounts. Although Thin (2012) advocates for discussions of wellbeing being focused more on how people can live really good lives than simply reducing hardship, it does seem there is a strong case to first secure a minimum standard of living for all before embarking upon more expansive wellbeing policies.

An Ethnographic Contribution?

A societal focus also implies questions of culture and ethnography. Despite some definitional problems, particularly the seemingly interminable issue of parsing English and British national identity (Cohen 2000), three cultural themes can be identified. This follows the work of Skey (2011) who suggests that there are ways of signalling the importance that one lives in a nation or place despite a lack of explicit self-identification with national identity as a source of happiness or unhappiness. Following on from the previous section, the first of these is the extent to which concerns about society in its happiness (Mathews 2012) were evident in over half of the accounts, particularly in relation to sources of unhappiness. The various social concerns and causes this entailed, and this social commentary being unsolicited, does caution against a literal reading of an idea that ‘western’ understandings of happiness are individualistic in contrast to the more collectivist interpretations of other cultures (Oishi et al 2013; Mathews 2012).

Another theme was the alignment of moderate conceptions and expectations of happiness with ideas of Britishness/Englishness. These emphasise the historical continuity of themes of moderation over excess and a scepticism for overly abstract or fanciful ideas (Easthope 1999; Fox 2004). As explored in Chapter Four, this was underpinned by a ‘naturalistic’ (Baggini 2008) or ‘informal empiricist’ epistemology: knowledge about the world is grounded in the concrete and “real” life of experience. This was particularly significant in reasoning provided about delimiting the scope of happiness, with an emphasis on moderate expectations and the limits of individual control.

A third cultural theme is an aspect of English/British identity that even scholars resistant to national categorisation seemed to broadly accept (Cohen 2000; Langlands 1999). This was a preference for the natural environment in terms of leisure pursuits, favourite places and as a catalyst for the kinds of elevating experiences explored in Chapter Six. Attitudes towards the city were ambivalent (although far fewer respondents lived in urban environments than the UK average). This theme echoes UK happiness survey research (ONS 2019) where higher self-reported life satisfaction is positively correlated with rural living.

Implications for Happiness Research and Methodological Reflections

A key advantage of the qualitative approach was how the data revealed critical attitudes concerning the nature of happiness. As outlined in Chapter One, one contribution this thesis makes to the field of Happiness Studies is to question an overly individualist concept of the “pursuit of happiness” for a more holistic, relational and nuanced sense of what happiness means. These more “critical” stances also highlight methodological concerns around conceptualising happiness as a knowable, thing-like entity which can be isolated and captured or as a quantity to be increased (Thin 2012). This was particularly evident from responses regarding reliving a happiest day or imagining the happiest one to come. These revealed nuanced and holistic interpretations about the nature, significance and expectations of happiness across the life-course. This complexity provides an important corrective to the blasé and dismissive attitudes of scholars like Cummins (2013) who claim that qualitative approaches are not justified as they simply regurgitate what quantitative studies have already revealed.

To be sure, some of these findings cohere with existing happiness research. The significance of relational life, for example, is a mainstay of survey findings. Yet qualitative approaches develop our understanding of a) why and in what ways relationships actually matter to happiness, b) the links and interactions between this and other wellbeing domains according to subjective interpretation and c) what sources of happiness are deemed more or less meaningful according to respondents themselves rather than a stultifying ‘all pleasures are equal’ approach. This relates to a second key contribution this thesis makes to the field of Happiness Studies: to emphasise how certain themes, around meaning, achievement and social connection, emerge through activities and pastimes that individuals themselves describe and analyse in relation to what happiness factors are particularly salient to their overall wellbeing.

Furthermore, Qualitative methodologies are key to understanding how personal and social ‘conceptions of the good’ (Sayer 2004:4) interact. This research, in line with other recent qualitative research (Cieslik 2017), appears to demonstrate a more socially-situated, interdependent self where, as one MO respondent put it, ‘I don't think that the state of happiness can be entirely internal, or self-centred’. This means that ‘any account of human social beings which attempts to cast people as overwhelmingly self-interested, so that even apparently altruistic acts are products of wily calculation by egotistical individuals, is inadequate, for it ignores our social, relational character and our dependence’ (Sayer 2011:121). When the main trend in happiness research is to construct quantitative methodologies that produce ‘limited, thin-sliced data’ (Thin 2012:324) based on

assumptions of individuals pursuing a greater quantity of hedonic satisfactions and emotions for themselves, this is something the discipline needs to address.

The weave and interaction between individual and social happiness and wellbeing also highlights the fallacy of measuring social happiness as the aggregate of personal experiences of happiness; it also underlines, in terms of a third key contribution this thesis makes to Happiness Studies, the importance of adopting a qualitative, interpretivist approach in capturing the complex ways in which individuals think about happiness in relation to themselves and their wider social context. A key reason why mainstream happiness research has missed these social concerns lies in its conceptualisation and measurement of happiness as an internal property of a higher or lower quantity of positive emotions and satisfactions that individuals possess and seek to maximise (Cieslik 2017; Thin 2012). This neglects an important normative dimension of happiness connected to themes of meaning, values and ideas about what a good life consists of (Dean 2009).

In addition, a broader temporal orientation (Walker & Kavedžija 2015) in terms of the ways respondents approached the subject complicates the idea of fixing happiness as a quantity in a particular moment- if the meanings, consequences and significance of these moments have yet to emerge or where these moments are understood partly by what came before. Therefore, an advantage of eliciting biographical data that grounds happiness across the life-course, is to see its processual nature, as a journey with peaks and troughs, turning points, transitions and major plotlines. In particular, a fourth key contribution this thesis makes to the field of Happiness Studies is to show how the meaning of happiness can change as we age.

Therefore, as Thin (2014:2) contends, happiness research needs to adopt methodologies which constitute individuals 'not only as objects of concern but also as subjective experiencers and evaluators of their own conditions'. The MOP panel accounts were powerful, deeply personal accounts full of drama and tragedy as well as the ordinary and mundane. As a researcher, I was often moved by them. They align with sociological theorizing (Plummer 2001; Sayer 2011) and empirical research (Cieslik 2017) that stress the importance of appreciating human subjects as 'sentient beings whose relationship to the world is one of concern...while we are capable and can flourish, we are also vulnerable and susceptible to various kinds of loss or harm' (Sayer 2011:1). They also highlight the uncertainty about the outcomes of choices concerning 'what is of value, how to live, what is worth striving for and what is not' (Sayer 2011:4).

However, there are disadvantages to the qualitative approach. As highlighted in Chapter Three, one of the problems of doing secondary, qualitative research is being unable to probe or enquire after the responses provided: you get what you are given. The format, to an extent, allowed respondents

to position or communicate themselves in ways they wish to be portrayed (Mason 2002; Dale et al 1988) or to make comments that hinted at a richer backstory which remained obscured. This was frustrating, as was understanding the reasons why respondents chose not to respond to certain questions. One related difficulty was trying hard not to make inferences and ‘fill in the gaps’ in lieu of causal explanations from the respondents themselves.

In addition, dealing with such a large corpus of data meant that, at first, attempting to winnow down codes into themes, sub-themes and key themes was hard to achieve without feeling that by doing so the sheer variety of responses have been to some degree flattened. Another methodological issue in doing Thematic Analysis was in managing a conflict between prioritising frequency and salience of responses. For example, emphasising the general affluence of the cohort while doing justice to the struggles of the four or five respondents who, as explored in Chapter Seven, are either unemployed and living in poverty and likewise those with long-term health conditions who are struggling to make ends meet.

Further research could explicitly seek accounts that could provide a sounder methodological grounding for political debates about increasing social happiness and wellbeing. In addition, further ethnographic study which deepens an understanding of how cultural context and national identity mediates happiness accounts would benefit the discipline by providing a more nuanced understanding of how social and cultural factors influence experiences and perceptions of happiness. Engaging with a more diverse and representative cohort than the Mass Observation Panel would enhance this ethnographic and sociological dimension, for example soliciting the views of a younger, urban and ethnically mixed demographic across a wider range of socio-economic backgrounds. This could be achieved through a variety of different qualitative methods, including interviews, focus groups and diaries and could also, as a mixed-method strategy, allow respondents to interpret and explain numerical self-reports. These endeavours wouldn’t only help to increase understanding of happiness, important though this is given its significance for agents and in wider culture. Given its ‘unique ability to unravel what matters most to people’ (Walker & Kavedžija 2015:2), happiness is a subject that gets to places other topics cannot reach, shedding light on personal lives but also politics, social issues and cultural phenomena. If the best way to achieve happiness is to look for something else (McMahon 2013), then asking questions about happiness is a good way to find about other subjects too.

Word Count: 104,170

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